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A Third Person.

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"INTERFERENCE," "A FAMILY LIKENESS," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

STEALING A MARCH.

CHRISTMAS, however frosty, always seemed to thaw General Yaldwin's heart ; he was liberal in tips, he made presents to his next-door neighbours, there was holly about the grim drawing-room, and a monster turkey hanging in the larder.

On Christmas morning he actually kissed Rose—that is to say, he rubbed his moustache in the vicinity of her left eye—and told her that after breakfast she was to go and see what her grandmother had for her. A pair of gloves, or a veil, were the limit of her expectations, but she was wrong ; the old lady, who was propped up in bed, with feeble hands and the intense sympathy of the nurse, placed a lovely sable boa round Rose's neck, and a pair of gold bangles on her wrists. Her granddaughter was in ecstasies ; these were just the things she had always longed for ; how could grandmamma guess ? Grandmamma had consulted Annie Baggot, and these were the exultant results. As Miss Yaldwin, wearing her new boa, stepped out briskly through the snow, *en route* to church, that Christmas morning, she felt happy, and her happiness was reflected in her face. Roger was not in church, but as they walked home together, Annie had informed her that he was expected in the afternoon. Mrs. Skyler spoke a few words to the Yaldwins outside their gate, and stared long and fixedly at Rose. Certainly a sable boa looks to great advantage under a prettily rounded young chin, dress works wonders, and Mrs. Skyler felt more respect for the girl than she had ever done before. Roger arrived by the afternoon mail, and

as soon as he had exchanged greetings with his relations and presented his offerings, he hastened in to No. 13. Surely on Christmas Day there could be no ill-feeling, and he was resolved not to stand any nonsense *this* time. Alas for his determination! Mrs. Skyler accompanied him, volunteered her escort in her pleasantest manner; imploring him in her playful way, "not to go without poor little me." In company with "poor little me," the visit was paid, and he saw his divinity looking prettier than ever, most fashionably dressed, and undoubtedly pleased to see him, but he scarcely succeeded in exchanging a dozen words with her. The general talked to him incessantly about army news, and the chances of a row on the frontier, and the prospect of an advance on Meshed or Herat; the Transcaspian railway was discussed at great length, and Rose heard with dismay that Captain Hope expected to be ordered off at any moment; there was a certain amount of conversation about stamps, and then Mrs. Skyler made a signal for departure, and alas! it had been just like any ordinary formal call, and Rose could have gone up to her own room and wept. But instead of this, she had to spend a couple of hours with her grandmother in order to allow the nurse to go and see her friends. As for Roger, he struggled frantically, but in vain, to break through the meshes in which Clara had once more entangled him. She appeared to have apportioned every hour of his day, and repeatedly reminded him that, "Your visit is to *us*, you know; your time is short, and *we* really cannot spare you." She laid herself out to charm him never so wisely; but she failed in her project when she threw out dark hints respecting a family disgrace next door, and mentioned in casual conversation, what an awful temper Rose Yaldwin had, and that she and her grandfather fought like a cat and dog, and it was all her fault, every one declared. But as Roger was behind the scenes, he was entrenched from these poisoned arrows as in a fastness, and he noticed that when his cousin recalled all her fair neighbour's unpleasant little attributes, she squinted in a most unbecoming manner, and he began to take a decided, though secret, aversion to the charming but malicious Clara. It was truly a case of so near and yet so far: when the general called he was unfortunately out, and when he escaped from Clara and hurried next door, the general was from home, and, face to face with Leach's grim visage, he could not ask for

Miss Yaldwin. He seemed to be baffled so easily, that he could have laughed, only he felt quite desperate and furious. He had come down to Morpington to see a certain girl, he had been four days in the next house, and only met her once and exchanged a dozen words with her. On the other hand, he saw more than enough of Clara Skyler; she sat over the fire with him, and talked to him confidentially, and flattered him discreetly; she took him for long walks, or to musical teas, and scarcely let him out of her sight. Mrs. Baggot and Annie looked on in the characters of neutral spectators, and marvelled to one another as to how it would all end? Clara was very strong, they knew, and a most determined woman; but could she marry a man against his will—a man who was desperately in love with a girl in the very next house? Alas, according to Mrs. Baggot's experience, such things had been. People may think Roger Hope a poor, weak-kneed creature, and a feeble-minded idiot, but he was nothing of the sort; unfortunately for him, he was not nearly as clever, or as full of resource (and lies) as his cousin, and he had a sensitive horror of hurting any one's feelings, especially a woman's; and when Clara appealed to him to take her out one day, and he had made a gallant stand, and politely excused himself, she had turned upon him a pair of eyes swimming in tears, and said in a broken voice, "There are so—so few people I really care for, so few who understand me, so few who sympathize with me, and I *did* think you and I were going to be such friends," and slowly then left the room, sobbing softly to herself. Of course Roger felt that he was a brute, and of course he apologized and "never did it again."

After five blank days, fortune and fate smiled on him! He had cherished a distracted vision of waiting on the general, and formally asking for Miss Yaldwin's hand, but he had not obtained the young lady's views on the subject, and Clara had assured him that as long as he lived, the general would never permit Rose to marry. One drizzling afternoon, the captive escaped to the club, accompanied by Jacky, who had also revisited Morpington. As he stood on the steps, he saw a girl laden with books hurry into the library across the street. In less than a minute he was beside her.

"Miss Yaldwin," he exclaimed, "I am delighted to see you. Let me carry your books. You are exchanging them, of course?"

Perhaps you will allow me to help you to choose some others. know where all the new novels are to be found."

"Very likely; but I am not in search of fiction just at present. Grandpapa wants bound volumes of the *Asiatic Review* and some dry old work about the Tartar invasion," she answered, as they walked side by side into the long library. It proved to be empty, and here was indeed a chance for Roger at last!

"How is it," he inquired, "that I never see you now? I have been next door to you for five days. I have called almost daily; but I am never admitted. Leach does not approve of me, I can see. But, joking apart, what have I done to offend your grandfather?"

"Nothing, I am certain," she answered colouring; "but we are generally out when you come."

"But I have called at all hours," he persisted. "There seems a fatality against our meeting. I can't understand it."

Rose coloured a shade deeper. She understood all about it perfectly.

"And how are you getting on now?" he continued.

"Very well, thank you."

"And your brother?"

"Oh, only pretty well, I am afraid," meeting his gaze with bright moist eyes. "I sometimes think that I may one day go out and keep house for him, as you suggested. Do you remember?"

He remembered; but when he had made the suggestion, Hubert was about the last person he had in his mind. "But would your grandfather spare you?" he asked incredulously. If spared to Hubert, why not to *him*?

"I don't know. Of course I could not leave grannie at present, and as long as she wants me I shall stay with her."

"And your grandfather—is he in a milder mood than formerly?"

"He is very kind to me now, and only think! he is going to take me to the ball on the eighteenth."

"Hurrah! you don't really say so!"

"Yes. The duke is coming to open the new town hall, and as grandpapa is on the committee he is obliged to be present; and I am to go too." She paused to bow to two ladies who had recently entered, and under pretence of looking at magazines, were closely studying her and her companion.

"Your first dance, of course? I hope I shall be here for it, but I may be telegraphed for any day. I shall be uncommonly sorry to go. I've never cared a straw before."

"Have you not?" "Of course he is thinking of Clara," she mentally remarked.

"And about this ball on Thursday? How many dances may I have? The first waltz and three others—and supper?"

"Oh, Captain Hope—so many?"

"You will no doubt have hosts of clamouring partners; but remember, it will be my last dance in England for many a day."

"I will remember," she replied, and her face fell.

"Go out, Jacky!" roared the young man to Jacky, who, in the condition of a muddy door-mat, came trotting briskly up the room. "I left you at the club. Don't you know, sir, that dogs are not allowed in here?"

Jacky pleaded with his eyes and crouched abjectly, and then turned and travelled dejectedly away.

"I wonder you brought him down again," said Rose.

"Oh, he wished to revisit his old haunts before leaving his native land, and he wanted to say good-bye to you."

"But surely you are not taking him out to India?"

"Of course I am. Do you suppose that I would give away your grandfather's present? And—I have another reason besides."

(There were twenty people in the library now, chiefly elderly ladies. He dared not speak out. As it was, this interview was being conducted under the strictest surveillance.)

"What can that be?" she asked innocently.

"Can you not guess?" he returned, with considerable significance.

Rose poked the carpet nervously with her damp umbrella, and made no reply. It could not be possible that he was carrying Jacky round the globe because he had been her dog!

"My aunt is going to ask you and your grandfather to a little family dinner on Tuesday," resumed her companion, "with a round game of cards to follow. I rely upon you to persuade him, and to break the spell that seems to lie over Nos. 13 and 15."

"I will do my best," she answered; "but I have not much influence with grandpapa—nothing in comparison to Mrs. Skyler."

"Nonsense! How extraordinary! I should have thought that he was quite impervious to her fascinations—absolutely fire-proof—all his feelings securely stored up in a patent Chubb-locked safe. And here comes Annie."

At this moment Miss Baggot, clad in a long moist mackintosh, came tramping towards them, bearing a huge bunch of mistletoe in her hand, with an air of triumphant complacency.

"Good gracious, Annie!" cried her cousin, in a tone of affected horror. "Have you been walking about the town with that?" pointing to her burden. "What rashness—not to mention the impropriety of the thing and the temptation you have been putting in people's way!"

"Oh, I got it at a greengrocer's across the road—a bargain," she answered serenely. "Clara told me to be sure and not come back without it, and here it is."

"And better late than never, eh? Well, we will all escort it home in a cab. Miss Yaldwin and I have too much respect for ourselves to be seen with you on foot. And now shall we choose some books?"

There was a good deal of talking and joking over the selection, which proved to be an unusually tedious business; but when it was successfully accomplished, Roger insisted on the two ladies having tea with him at a well-known confectioner's. Annie did the honours with zeal, and was surprisingly facetious and talkative. It was a right merry meal—thoroughly enjoyed by all (including Jacky, who gorged himself with buttered muffins and shortbread). When it was over, they rattled off in a fly in the highest spirits, with Jacky under the seat, the mistletoe trailing from the window, and Roger saying to himself: "Come, this is like old times!" and proudly conscious of having stolen a march on Clara, hoping that Rose understood him, and that they would make it all right at the ball. Rose, on her part, was keenly alive to the fact that, despite the rain and mud and an impending scolding, she had spent a delightful afternoon and was supremely happy. As for Annie she was as proud as the traditional peacock. She felt that she was enacting the part of a benevolent fairy to these two young people, and that if Clara could but see her now, she would scarcely call her—as she had done that very morning—"a harmless imbecile!"

CHAPTER XX.

KEEPING THE CAB WAITING.

THE little dinner with a round game to follow, thanks to the artifices of Clara Skyler, never came off; and it so happened, also thanks to Clara Skyler, that Roger and Rose saw nothing of one another until the day of the ball. It was a most unpromising afternoon—the keen wintry blast seemed to penetrate to the bone. It was beginning to sleet, and Rose was hastening in through the garden gate—her grandfather had the latch-key already in the door—when Captain Hope eagerly accosted her.

"Good afternoon, Miss Yaldwin; I have just had a telegram, and I'm off by the mail to-morrow morning."

"Oh, are you?" she rejoined rather blankly.

"Yes; sail in the 'Euphrates' on Saturday; not an hour to spare. I say," coming a step closer, and speaking in a low and impressive tone, "you will be certain to come to-night—nothing will prevent you? Promise me," he urged, looking at her steadily.

"I promise you," she answered, with a somewhat nervous laugh. "You seem to forget that it is my first ball, and I shall be only too anxious to go."

"I know, I know; but I have a particular reason—that I am sure you must guess—something I must say to you, and ——"

"Rose! what are you about?" bawled the general from the steps. "What the deuce do you mean by keeping the door open in this way?"

And Rose, whose duty it was to accord instant obedience, with a quick little nod to her companion, turned and ran up the path and into the house with a heightened colour.

"Never mind," said Hope to himself as he entered No. 15, "there is a good time coming. I wonder if those bouquets have turned up yet?"

Meanwhile the general now sorely repented him of his promise respecting the ball; nevertheless, he intended to stick to his word like a man of honour.

"What on earth does an old fellow of my age want going to these tomfooleries?" he demanded irritably of his grandchild; "wearing an evening coat and a pair of tight boots and white

kid gloves, in order to watch a pack of idiots capering round the room. Catch me ever at another such 'Tamasha.' The only comfort is, that Scholes and Wapshott are bound to be there, and they hate it even worse than I do. There is nothing for *us* to do all night, but stand about in draughts and do our best to catch our deaths of cold."

"There will be the supper," suggested Rose, with the innocence of nineteen years.

"Supper!" he repeated ferociously; "why don't you say suicide at once, miss? Do you suppose that *I* am a likely person to while away the time—and my few remaining days—in consuming watery lobster-salad, stale tarts, or even slices of fat ham? I know a ball supper. Pah!"

"Well, at least you will get a rubber of whist," she ventured, timidly; "and you will like that."

"I shall like nothing about it," he answered morosely. He further informed her that he would not dress until after dinner; there was lots of time before eleven o'clock.

This was a perfectly natural arrangement for an old gentleman who was not engaged for the first dance, but Rose piteously explained that "they were invited for half-past nine, sharp; besides, that being on the committee, he was supposed to be punctual, in order to receive the guests."

"Be hanged to it, so I have! and I'd give ten pounds down to get out of the whole thing. Well, send word to Collins to be here at half-past nine to the minute;" and after issuing this command the general relapsed into awe-inspiring gloom.

Dinner was a dismal meal, eaten in a silence punctuated by the general's angry sighs and Leach's deferentially tendered wines and dishes. As soon as it had come to an end Rose flew up to her own room, eager to partake of the first delights of her first dance.

Yes, there was her fresh white gauze and satin dress laid out on the bed in all its glory, not to speak of its proper accompaniment of gloves, shoes, lace handkerchief and fan.

Two candles illuminated the dressing-table, and Carter, the housemaid, was in attendance as ladies'-maid for this unusual occasion.

And now the delightful operation of preparing for the ball commenced. "How neat her shoes were; how well her dress

fitted!" thought Rose—her first low body! Yes, and "she had done her hair most beautiful," so Carter assured her, adding the criticism that "any one would think as them back twists was put on false." At last she was ready, and she really could not help smiling at her own radiant face in the glass—and to her question,

"If she was all right?" Carter replied with enthusiasm:

"Lawks, Miss Rose! I never saw anythink so pretty. I'd never—never 'ave known you!"

"Fine feathers make fine birds, don't they, Carter?" rejoined the young lady modestly, and with a last glance at her reflection and a happy sigh, she rustled downstairs to show herself to her grandmamma.

The old lady was as usual propped up in bed, with a shawl over her shoulders and her ear-trumpet beside her. Having deliberately assumed her glasses she proceeded to inspect her granddaughter with immense interest. Rose was obliged to turn slowly round and round, to walk up and down the room. At last Mrs. Yaldwin was satisfied.

"She looks nice, doesn't she, Dixon?" (Dixon was the nurse.) "I believe she is very like what I was as a girl, only not quite so fair."

Here indeed was a sermon, in a few words, on the transient existence of natural charms, had Rose been in a frame of mind to meditate on such matters; but Rose was far too intent upon the ecstasies of the present moment to spare one thought to either past or future.

How could she bring home to herself the cruel lesson that life was but a fleeting show: that the fair, young, brilliant creature she saw reflected in the cheval glass would one day resemble the shrivelled, wrinkled, bedridden old woman who was now watching her with sunken envious eyes?

"Dear me! It seems only the other day since I was going to my first ball," whimpered Mrs. Yaldwin; "and I wore white satin too! Ah! dear me, dear me! Well, I hope you will have a very pleasant evening, Rosie—one you can look back on all your life. If you only had a lover now, the whole thing would be perfect."

Carter and Dixon exchanged furtive glances. Captain Hope's attentions had been frequently discussed below stairs.

Mrs. Yaldwin, who was unquestionably foolish at times, and had always been of a romantic turn, continued in her shrill, chirruping voice:

"What's that your grandfather was telling me, about that young man who brings him stamps? You know who I mean—the one who *shouts* so dreadfully."

"Oh, grandmamma!" protested Rose, covered with confusion and blushes.

"Well, well, come here. Dixon, where's that brooch? Just hold the candle. Now come quite close, Rose; I am going to lend you—only *lend* you, mind—my diamond brooch. It will look well in the tucker of your frock—Jane was asking about it, but she shan't get it."

And with trembling, fumbling fingers, the old lady pinned the brilliants into the front of the girl's satin bodice.

"I will give it to you some day—not now; I expect to wear it again myself, eh, Dixon? I remember I wore it for the first time at the governor-general's ball at Calcutta. There now, I am tired. Kiss me, and go away and enjoy yourself, and be sure and come and tell me all about it to-morrow."

Rose promised faithfully. As she went downstairs she saw the servants peeping over the balustrade that led to the lower regions, and heard exclamations such as, "Laws! Don't she look splendid!" emanating from the cook and kitchenmaid. She glanced eagerly at the hall clock; it was on the stroke of half-past nine; she heard the fly stop at the gate—Collins was always to the minute—her heart beat high; she felt half-choked with various strange and delightful emotions, as she turned the handle of the dining-room door, and walked in.

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But what was this? Truly a change came o'er the spirit of her dream when her eyes fell on the table, still littered with dessert, her grandfather in his usual attire, with his silk handkerchief spread over his face, lying back in his chair asleep and—snoring—gentle, comfortable snores. And it was half-past nine o'clock, and fully time to start. But this, alas, was not the worst. When General Yaldwin fell asleep, be it after dinner or at any other period, no one, save the minar, dared awake him. He always maintained that he slept so miserably that these

occasional forty winks of his were priceless. Poor Rose! She sat down and looked at the clock in despair. She herself was ready to the very last button of her glove. How long would he sleep? How long would he take to dress? These were the vital questions that she debated with feverish anxiety. She had known him to sleep for twenty minutes, and she had known these naps to be prolonged for hours.

Presently Leach entered, and began to remove the dessert things, as it were, secretly and silently. Oh, how she wished he would break a decanter, or anything. He then proceeded to make up the fire with the caution of a conspirator. Why did he not let the poker fall with a clang? If he would she would thankfully give him a golden sovereign from her scanty store. Were not moments to her as valuable as untold gold? Unfortunately for the agonized girl, Leach was an old soldier, and the general was his master, his superior officer, his idol, his graven image; he would not awake him purposely for half a year's pension.

Alas, it was now a quarter to ten. Rose watched the slow gilt hands travelling along the black dial until they came to ten o'clock. She was aware of the brisk driving of carriages—the people from next door had long departed; she had heard the gate clang, and the cab move off.

Oh, this was maddening, to sit powerless, and losing all this precious time, watching a black marble timepiece, and listening to an old man's long-drawn snores.

At length the patient Collins sent in a respectful message, "He had another fare, and must go, but would return without fail within half-an-hour," and soon afterwards he rattled away. It was now half-past ten. If the general would but wake all was not yet lost; he could easily dress in ten minutes—*his* hair would not take long to arrange—but no, he slept and snored on. Collins returned in the most honourable manner, at eleven to the minute, and rang a rousing peal. Rose opened the door and went out to him herself, clad in all the glories of her new white fur-trimmed opera cloak.

"The general is not ready yet," she explained; "if you will wait a little, I will give you ten shillings out of my own pocket."

"I'm afraid you'll be very late, ma'am," replied Collins; "the rooms was crammed to the door when I took Mrs. Duke just

now. It's a bitter night to keep the horse standing ; being my own property, you see——"

"I am very sorry ; but surely you have a rug. Oh, please *do* wait?" she urged almost tearfully.

Leach, who highly disapproved of this long conference and open door, now came forward and said :

"You will catch your death of cold, miss. Go in. I have all his things laid out ready, and the hot water ready to take up in one minute."

"You *will* wait a little, Collins?" she entreated.

"Well, miss," moved by her pretty, piteous face and eyes, in which two tears were twinkling, "I'll do my best ; but I have other jobs to bring home about half-past twelve—supper or no supper—and a fare from next door to catch the three o'clock express to-morrow morning."

"A fare from next door to catch the three o'clock express!" Of course it was Captain Hope, and Collins would drive him away, and she would never, never see him again.

She returned to the dining-room, and in desperation ventured to move the chairs about, and to give the fire shovel a timid push ; but it was all of no avail. General Yaldwin continued to slumber like an infant, his head thrown back, his mouth open, his legs extended, and his hands lightly crossed above the seat of hunger. Meanwhile Rose sat and watched him, her heart palpitating with sickening suspense.

It was now half-past eleven—a quarter to twelve—and then twelve chimed solemnly from a neighbouring church clock.

Twelve strokes, as fatal to poor Rose as the same hour to immortal Cinderella, for, as the last clanged out, Collins, the long-suffering, drove remorselessly away. Yes, it was all over, her chance of going to the ball and her last opportunity of seeing Roger Hope before he sailed for India, and leaning her head on her hands, Rose's long pent-up feelings found an outlet, and she burst into tears. She lay softly sobbing, with her arms on the table, until she gradually cried herself to sleep, and thus forgot all her sorrows. She dreamt that she was in a splendidly illuminated hall, thronged with people, all gaily dressed in evening costume, and among the crowd she saw Captain Hope, always endeavouring to approach her, and always, just as their hands touched, being swept away.

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She was aroused from her tantalizing vision and suddenly awoke by a violent thump on the table, and raising her stiffened neck, she gazed across at her grandfather in mute amazement. Then she recollected all.

"God Almighty bless my soul!" he roared; "what does this mean? You and I asleep in the dining-room at two o'clock in the morning."

"You fell asleep after dinner, grandpapa," she answered with quivering lip; "and so—and so we never went after all."

"Never went after all?" he repeated, as if he still clung to some vague fond hope that they had been to the ball, and that this doze was the sequel. "You might have awoke me! Why did you not awake me?" he demanded. "Eh?"

It was vastly fine to ask such a question *now*. Rose knew right well, and so did he, that if he had been roused untimely he would have exploded in wrath and gone straight, not to the ball, but to finish his nap in bed. And Rose made no reply, but sat and stared at her grandparent with a white haggard face and a long gaze of inarticulate reproach.

"I am really sorry," he said; "I must have slept like a top. A most unusual thing for *me*. Yes, I'm uncommonly sorry, and after all the trouble of getting yourself under arms too! Well, never mind, Rosie; I'll buy you a very smart frock and take you to the next ball. I'll make the *amende honorable*, I give you my word."

But what would these promises of balls and dresses avail poor Rose, when by that time, Roger Hope would be thousands of miles away beyond the seas?

"I suppose we may as well be going to bed?" continued the general cheerfully as he rose. "Our candlesticks are in the hall, and at any rate we are something to the good—we have had our *first sleep*."

As Rose dragged herself wearily upstairs, her grandmother's door was softly opened, and Dixon peeped out and beckoned her in.

"She has been waiting for you, miss; I could not get her to sleep. She has been that restless and excited all night, I cannot think what has come to her. Please come in for just a minute or two and humour her."

"Well, Rose, my dear!" her grandmother called out, "how

sad you look! Did you not get many dances? Was the shouting man not there? How well you have kept your dress; why, it's as fresh as when you left. Come close to me, then I can hear you," now holding up an eager trumpet, "and tell me all about it. Did you enjoy yourself?"

This was the last drop in the unhappy girl's cup.

"Oh, grandmamma!" she exclaimed. She could not command her voice sufficiently to utter another word, as with a gesture of deprecation she stooped and kissed the old lady and fled out of the room.

(To be continued.)

Social Life in Galicia, North Spain.

"I HEARD you speak," said Mrs. A——, a friend whom I met in "town" the other day, "of social life in Galicia, Spain, as though there was a wide difference between the life there and our English life. Where would the differences show? Coruña, say, is not so far off as to make the *modus vivendi* very apparent, I should think."

"Oh! my dear," I replied, "you speak in ignorance. It may amuse you to give a little sketch of Galician social customs, and to exemplify better, let me follow the life of a middle-class Gallega—a girl, say.

"We will christen her Carmen, and let us imagine that, having had salt put in her mouth at the ceremony, to signify wit, the hopes have been realized, and the girl grows into a bright little being. Carmen's education must include music, chiefly of a superficial style, embroidery—you see I put these first, for a secondary thing is the mental work, generally leaving off when even rudiments are indifferently known. A disheartening practice to the teacher is the withdrawal of a girl from school at about fourteen, when she is put in '*largo*' (long dresses), tight-laced, and taught to 'show off.' Should there be a natural craving for books, as in our Carmen's case, I pity the girl—light novels she may get occasionally, solid books and *the Bible* never; while she is cramped and curbed by a foolish mother and, in most cases, an ignorant bigoted priest. Carmen must now not walk out daily, only on *fieste* days and on Sundays and Thursdays, but she may sprawl for hours over a balcony, and even chat with the passers-by. No healthy games for girls in Galicia. I could not imagine a Gallega playing lawn-tennis with her tightened dress and high-heeled shoes, but she may ogle the men; filled with the idea to marry is her one aim and object in life. Say that our Carmen meets with a

lover: the man for a long while stares up at the balcony, follows the girl about, stares at her as though possessed (it is *repulsive*, this manner of staring!), eventually shuffles letters, into a servant's hands, and in most instances receives answers, in the same way; it may be months before the man comes forward in a manly style, as with us. There is, however, a tacit understanding, and *if* the affair comes to the point, it is only just before marriage that he is admitted into the house, then at stated intervals, and *never* alone; while the girl is not actually introduced to her future husband's family until *after* marriage. Well, say Carmen marries—this ceremony must take place in the early morning, at about seven; she dressed in *black*! There is a curious custom which takes place during the wedding service, called *arras*. The bridegroom casts into the hollow outstretched hands of the bride thirteen pieces of current coins marked with a cross. Old Spanish coins had all a very conspicuous cross, but now it is to be seen only on the top of the crown over the Spanish *escudo*. The bride must be careful not to let these coins drop, according to superstition. There appear to be two definitions in the word *arras*—past payment of a stipulated affair; given as a token also; for, according to popular belief, this is the payment of the bride's body. The custom is most likely a Moorish remnant; one finds Moorish traces all over Spain. There is no wedding ring! There are no laws to protect a girl in her love affairs, I mean there can be no 'breach of promise' case. A man may change at the church door, 'an' he will.' Several girls have told me 'they never really felt certain of their marriage until the ceremony was actually begun!' In Galicia, if a girl's life was restricted in many ways before marriage, it is worse now. She could then dance, now save only in *rigodons*, a kind of quadrille; also, if she excelled as a musician before, now it is not etiquette to play or sing—play for dancing if she likes, but *not* to 'show off.' She must walk out still protected. You will see occasionally pretty young creatures like our Carmen accompanied by vulgar, coarse, so-called *doncellas* (housemaids), with whom they may chat, or they may go veiled to mass alone. A Galician husband, after the first year, is rarely seen with his wife. They may be said almost to live separate lives, save in public places of resort, as the theatre, &c. *He* haunts the *cafés*; the word *home*, as we know

it, does not exist for them. In *réunions* the men sit together, the married women and the girls in separate coteries. As you may imagine, the general conversation of the women is *weari-some to a degree*. Poor things! no books, or what *makes* reading in our sense. A local paper they get, and naturally gossip reigns. If they are amiable, it is harmless gossip—if gossip *can* be harmless. It is something terrible, the ignorance of a Gallega of all life outside Coruña, and the crude ideas of *all faiths* save their own, all classed under the synonym *Jew!* The men, who have better advantages, rarely converse *sense* with women.

"And, oh! how terrible is widowhood. My heart has often ached for the young ones. Say Carmen loses her husband: the body is dressed in his best walking clothes, booted, &c. ; is watched day and night for twenty-four hours, lights burning round it, prayers said over it. The funeral car is chosen according to the amount of money wished to be expended; there are three different kinds. The car is drawn by two mules, the same as used for the dust carts in the morning. Funerals take place at night (if at night they are accompanied by torches) or late evening, and attendants—*dust-men*—dressed in long black coats and tall hats; doleful music is played on a species of large flute. The coverings of the mules are hideous-looking—black cloth, lined with white, a death's head, designed in white, large enough to cover the mule's head. A procession is formed—priests, relations and friends, and closed carriages follow (if a person of position), also any one can join in on foot. I must tell you, the moment a death takes place, a table covered with a black cloth with death's heads and cross bones designed on it, is placed in the entrance hall; a crucifix stands on the table and two candles. A man sits with an open book before him, and men—heads of different families—go and write their names in this, expressive of sympathy. The printed notices informing of a death are very depressing-looking: the black border, the call to pray for the soul of the departed, often promising indulgences for said prayers in the name of the disconsolate relatives, all headed by the inevitable death's head, &c.

"The widow, for ten days, daily receives visits of condolence in a darkened room; visitors in black; the widow must not dress her hair, and is rolled up in a black shawl. For a year, she must not be seen in any public promenade, and then must go out only

at deep dusk. Meanwhile, prayers are prayed for the soul at stated occasions, and as *years* and *years* go on, each anniversary there must be a repetition of masses for the repose of said soul, black again assumed, and church lived in. The more money paid, the sooner the soul comes out of purgatory."

"Oh! my dear," said my friend, "you make me shiver! What are the calling rules?"

"Rules?" I said, laughing sarcastically; "*none*. I tell you frankly, there are houses where I have never seen the inside, after a residence of thirteen years, yet if I didn't punctiliously call, offence would be taken. Families live in *pisos*, or flats; servants are indifferently *bad*; dinner is any hour from two to four; if I call early, 'dining,' if later, 'sleeping,' later still, 'out.' My position as wife of an English official won't let me be admitted without etiquette, for they are a proud race. Of course, there are exceptions, invariably in the case of persons who have travelled, and so more *au fait* to modern customs, who keep hours for visitors; but the rule is as I say. There are no porters, and I do confess to returning home in a wretched temper, tired out scrambling up badly-lighted staircases. Each door has a movable wheel, which opens and shuts, an eye *appears*, a voice *growls*, 'Who's there?' You answer, 'Your servant,' to meet with an excuse as before stated. One day I was so tired that I said irritably to a servant, 'Your señora is at home, I heard her; I must come in!' I regretted it afterwards: the girl was scolded; such a scene of confusion I never saw before, and the poor lady was so fretted at the *Consula* finding all this. 'Then why expect me to call?' I said. She was a lady highly connected; at balls, &c., shone resplendent in family jewels and velvets; but dress for *home* is not thought of: the moment upon returning, everything is changed; the phrase, 'anything for the house,' holds good. It is difficult to meet with house shoes as *we* wear them. I invariably have to order them, my shoemaker always reasoning, 'Patch up old boots, señora!' or 'Buy *alparagatas*,' a coarse slipshod slipper. But wherever *we* differ, it is put down to 'the *eccentricity* of the English.' I have a weekly 'at home.' These same ladies come beautifully dressed, with vows and protestations of friendship, but their houses to me are besieged castles!"

"Do they promenade, have music?" said Mrs. A.

"There are lovely gardens and walks in Coruña, and a good

band plays twice weekly, but, so singular are Coruña customs, no one walks out until dusk. I have often wondered why, have imagined the windiness of the climate might account for this; but there are days of beautiful weather, quite free from wind, when you will see at an early hour children, nurses and soldiers only in the promenades; times indeed when wind has risen at sundown, *instead* of abating. At an hour when we are returning home, the *monde* is going out. Ah! what an utterly lonely life it has been for us; terrible, terrible!"

"Let me think, dear," said Mrs. A., "upon what other points I really need information. We will have done with the shivering sadness of Coruña 'pomp and pageantry of woe;' but tell me a little more about the love affairs. How long may a lover be seen talking to a girl?"

"Whenever he has time. I knew an instance of a young man who, on an average, spent seven hours shouting up to a window during the twenty-four!"

"Greatly detrimental to the girl's domestic routine, I should think," said Mrs. A.

"Yes! I must laugh at the affair. The man in question stood on a dung hill at the back of the house, infested by rats; a love ardour, undoubtedly. He offered himself and his *capa* (cloak); he had nothing else."

"You spoke of houses: what style are they?"

"Well, dear, outside imagine a pack of glass cards—so to speak—'glass, glass, nothing but glass,' as a traveller once said to me. Well, the frontages have glass galleries jutting out from the main building; these galleries are my horror: they let in rain in the winter, heat in the summer, but it is Galician architecture, and perfect in the eyes of the 'Coruñeses.' Fire-places are eschewed, as a rule, as unhealthy; and in a country where it rains the larger proportion of a winter, with a temperature none too high, imagine the discomfort! Braziers are in use, wretched inventions, to my idea, but people will use these who would shrink away from a fire-place. When we first came into *exile* (for such I call it), papered walls were condemned as unhealthy. Ah! me, landing here; going first into a Coruña hotel, *Dios me libre!* Then into our house, *now* made bright and cheerful with paper and fire-places. My heart sank, and my boy was born amidst frettings and grumbings."

"Well, dear, don't fret now, but tell me something of the bathing."

"Oh," said I, laughing, "we are so civilized now, we even wear French bathing costumes. It was the funniest thing at first; round-about affairs were worn, often made of bedding stuff. Our girls, English *bonne* and I, screamed at with insulting epithets, in our pretty Biarritz costumes: 'Women dressed as men, &c.' Then we swam, a marvel, and now—oh yes, we are much more civilized—swimming is practised, and in some cases excelled in. Still much of the old routine exists; women who leisurely walk into the sea, then stoop down with umbrellas held over them, remaining immovable; in the distance looking like animated mushrooms, or fungi, for the sunshades are of all colours. Men and women bathe separately. At the bathing establishment, although, I repeat, more advanced now, there is still the same wretched attendance, the same howling, screaming women, with 'foul mouths giving voice.' There are a number of cabins, single and double, and one large room, a fixture, for chatting and dancing, where a piano is kept; there is a gallery outside, where men sit and ogle the bathers through glasses. I must tell you the actual bathing commences on St. Carmen's Day, the 16th July. The water is thought to be more efficacious on that day; the number of baths as a rule must not exceed fifteen or thirty. Bathing, either sea or mineral waters, is undertaken as a sort of 'thing to be got through,' and there are actually numbers of people who never have their bodies immersed until then. You will not be surprised when I tell you many take soap into the sea for a very necessary cleansing process. I can't refrain from a little anecdote here. I felt *we* were impressing the natives with an idea of cleanliness, for we were naturally taking baths daily, when my housemaid said:

"'Por Dios! what dirty people you English must be to require so much washing.'"

"Are the men sportsmen?"

"Oh, valiant to a degree in *appearance*. Let me give you an instance. I was out walking one day right out in the country, with my husband, when we saw a sportsman, gun in rest, stealing along, a setter and *French poodle*."

"Oh! The poodle, with decorated tail and artistically shaven back."

"Well, on we stole, and we stood still breathless."

"Was there a covey of partridges, a chance hare, &c?"

"A number of tiny birds *settled* on a furrow; our gallant sportsman shot amongst these; on flew the dogs, and one *tiny* sparrow was found dead. I think keen sportsmen are men who have learned the art away from Galicia, for as a rule there is no respect of game laws. And a wholesale slaughter goes on; shooting *sitting* game is quite allowable."

"I can quite believe your life has been a lonely one."

"Yes, indeed," I replied. "Our very manner of walking is different; we 'go' as if we meant it, scour the country round, and at healthy hours; the Coruñeses *crawl* in a slow measured pace, always in toilette; the girls, no matter how cold the day, without jackets or mantles: the figure would be hidden too much with these. Then they have stated distances, the same monotonous walks from year's end to year's end. I laughingly tell my girls if I were to meet a lady outside the groove I should faint with surprise. *We* are the eccentric people, and even now surprise is expressed at our energy. 'A donkey for mother if she can't walk all the distance,' when proposing an excursion. And it is by such means, the bracing up our nerves, revelling in God's beautiful country surrounding Coruña, and keeping our library stocked, that we have not utterly stagnated here in a country still hundreds of years behindhand. Perhaps, also, in a life that has never been genial to us, I have felt the bigoted one-sided influence. I speak amongst the women; men rarely trouble themselves one way or the other. I will give you one instance. My girls have a young friend, a bright intelligent girl of Spanish birth, born in France, where she resided some years. 'J.' was longing for a change from the country, where her parents generally reside; I invited her; she stayed with us about two months. I naturally sent her to mass on Sundays, never coerced in any way; the girl was *entrusted* to me, that was enough. Since her return home the mother and 'J.' have had a sort of petty persecution because of this visit, which revived and brightened the girl, a visit she looks back upon with keen pleasure. But the general impression is that 'J.'s' future, after death, will be imperilled by living so long with heretics, and questions as to the final absolution started.

"Yes ; I have never felt I could open my mind in friendship ; confidences would be ignored in the confessional, and I have invariably felt a chilliness from those most expressing warmth during Lent, a season requiring much *Church exercise*, but *not* teaching the '*Charity which thinketh no evil.*'"

LOUISA MARY RAWSON-WALKER.

A Packet of Letters.

I.

[From Miss le Breton, No. —, Grosvenor Street,
to Mrs. Arbuthnot, Hôtel de Provence, Cannes.]

" March 23rd.

" MY DEAREST CHARLOTTE,

"It is no use. Harry Barton is all that you say and more, but I am not suited to love in a cottage; I am ambitious. My husband must either have a name or make one, and making takes so long. Edith has married for money; I mean to marry for position. What are two poor and pretty girls to do? And love? I hear you ask reproachfully. Frankly, I do not much believe in it, as far as I am concerned at any rate. Perhaps I am cold-hearted. I do not know. I care for my friends; I would do anything for you. But I have never yet seen the man who would tempt me to give up the whole world for his sake, and that, I imagine, is what love means.

" Your loving cousin,

" CONSTANCE."

II.

[From Mrs. Meyer, No. —, Grosvenor Street,
to Mrs. Arbuthnot, Hôtel de Provence, Cannes.]

" April 25th.

" MY DEAR CHARLOTTE,

"I suppose you have heard of Connie's wonderful luck. Old Uncle Silas is dead, and has left her all his money, sixty thousand pounds. Nobody guessed he was worth anything like that sum, and Connie was the only person who took the trouble to be kind to him. He was always fond of her when she was quite a little girl. Well, his fondness was to some purpose. With her beauty and fortune she may marry any one, and I hope she will not throw herself away on that penniless young

barrister whom Henry is so fond of, and who is always hanging about the house. I have spoken to Connie about him, but she only laughs. You have more influence with her than any one else. I hope you will use it for her true interest.

"I suppose you will soon be coming home. The Riviera must be getting hot and dusty. Henry wishes me to say he hopes you will pay us an early visit—you are a great favourite with him, as you know, and Lotty is longing to see her god-mother.

"Ever your affectionate cousin,
"EDITH MEYER."

III.

[From Henry Barton, barrister-at-law, Inner Temple,
to Mrs. Arbuthnot, Cannes.]

"April 25th.

"MY DEAR MRS. ARBUTHNOT,

"It is all over. Even if Constance loved me—which she does not—I could not come forward now when she is an heiress and I have nothing. She will always be the one woman in the world for me, but our paths lie apart, and it only remains for me to thank you for your kind sympathy and encouragement, which I shall never forget.

"Yours very sincerely,
"HENRY BARTON."

IV.

[From Mrs. Arbuthnot to Harry Barton.]

"April 27th.

"MY DEAR HARRY,

"I am very sorry. I think Constance would have been happy with you. I suppose it is useless to try and move you from your determination. Love has small chance with a man when his pride is in question, and he never seems to remember how hard it is on the woman. Whether Constance cares for you or not I cannot say, but if I were in your place I would try my fate. She is worth risking a refusal for.

"Always your friend,
"CHARLOTTE ARBUTHNOT."

V.

[From Miss le Breton, No. —, Grosvenor Street,
to Mrs. Arbuthnot, Hôtel Splendide, Aix-les-Bains.]

"May 28th.

"MY DEAREST CHARLOTTE,

"The prince has appeared on the scene—a real prince, the Principe di San Felice, of an old Italian family. He was introduced to me at the Isaacsons' the other night, and since then not a day has passed without my seeing him. He is about thirty years of age, very handsome, with an aquiline nose and piercing dark eyes. Henry does not like him, but then you know poor dear Henry is so intensely insular. Can you imagine your little Connie a princess? I can quite. 'Principessa di San Felice.' How nice it sounds! Much better than Mrs. Harry Barton.

"He is not rich, but, thanks to poor Uncle Silas, that does not matter. He supplies the title and I the money. I speak as if it were already settled; but, indeed, I think it only depends upon me. I have but to hold up my finger and he will be at my feet.

"I wish you could see him. But you will, of course, very soon. His manners are too delightful for anything, and when he kisses my hand I feel like a queen. He says there are no women like the English, so beautiful, so virtuous. It has been the dream of his life to marry an Englishwoman.

"I saw Harry yesterday evening in the Row. He bowed very coldly. I was walking with the prince, and Edith was a little way behind. He has not been near the house since Uncle Silas died. Any one would think I had got the plague by the way he avoids me. He looked very ill. I suppose it is over-work.

"When *are* you coming? I shall be wooed and married and a' if you don't make haste. It was too provoking of your doctor to order you to Aix on the way home. Henry keeps worrying to know when you are expected. He says you are the only woman he knows with a grain of common sense. I hope you feel flattered. He thinks you will be on his side against the prince.

"A thousand kisses.

"Ever your loving,

"CONSTANCE."

VI.

[From Henry Meyer, No. —, Grosvenor Street, to Henry Barton, Inner Temple.]

"May 25th.

"MY DEAR HARRY,

"You are a fool for your pains, if you will excuse my saying so. While you are hanging back from a mistaken sense of delicacy, the ground is being cut from under your feet by a so-called Italian prince, who in my opinion is nothing better than an adventurer. He is never out of the house. My wife and Constance have put their heads together and I am nowhere. If you have any regard for the girl you will come forward and save her before it is too late. She is dazzled by his title and position, but I believe she has a secret weakness for you in her heart, and that you may beat him yet. She is more hurt than she chooses to own by your desertion. Only make haste about it. You have no time to lose.

"Yours ever,

"HENRY MEYER."

VII.

[From Miss le Breton to Mrs. Arbuthnot.]

"June 1st.

"MY DEAREST CHARLOTTE,

"The prince proposed to me to-night and I accepted him. I have been wondering ever since if I did right. I shall have a devoted husband, a splendid position. My wildest dreams are realized. And yet—Harry's face keeps haunting me as I saw it last, pale and sad under all its coldness. Well, it is his own fault. He could not expect *me* to make the advances. But, oh, Charlotte, why did you not come home a little sooner?"

"June 2nd.

"After all I only needed a little contradiction. Henry came in furious this morning after an interview with the prince, who had insisted on my fortune being settled on himself. Henry informed him that it was quite contrary to English custom, on which the prince drew himself up, said it had always been so in the San Felice family, and that to require anything else was an insult to himself.

"Henry used some strong language about a beggarly Italian fortune-hunter. I fired up. The prince was quite right, I declared. If I was ready to trust him with myself I could surely trust him with my money. Henry muttered something about the money being my best protection, but I would not listen. I am of age and I shall do as I please. The prince spoke to me about it to-night. He told me that he would rather give me up than that I should suspect him of mercenary motives, but that the pride of a San Felice could not submit to be dependent on a woman's bounty: a wife's interests should be identical with those of her husband. I quite agree with him. He looked very handsome and determined while he spoke. I had never liked him so well."

VIII.

[From Mrs. Arbuthnot to Miss le Breton.]

"Aix, June 4th.

"MY DEAREST CONSTANCE,

"Your letter has made me very uneasy. Better break off an engagement than be wretched for life. If you have the slightest feeling for Harry in your heart it is madness to marry another man, and of all men an Italian. I do not like what you tell me about the money. Listen to your brother-in-law. His judgment is sound and he is sincerely fond of you. Above all, do nothing in haste. If you really want me I will return at once, but my doctor is most anxious that I should remain another week to finish my cure.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"CHARLOTTE ARBUTHNOT."

IX.

[From Mrs. Meyer to Mrs. Arbuthnot.]

"July 5th.

"MY DEAR CHARLOTTE,

"Constance was married this morning. I am so sorry my aunt's illness prevented your being present. She looked perfectly lovely in her wedding dress. I have never seen a handsomer couple. The prince is simply devoted to her. He can scarcely bear her out of his sight. I am afraid he is a little inclined to be jealous. He would not allow her to accept any wedding presents from men. She held out for some time about

one—from that Mr. Barton that you and Henry are so infatuated about, though what you see in him I cannot conceive—but he carried his point. ‘Carina,’ he said, kissing her hand, ‘it is my love for you ; I cannot endure that any man but myself should give you presents.’ Connie yielded. He has a very strong will, and I think she is a little afraid of him. But that is as it should be. Henry says he only wishes I was afraid of him.

“Your affectionate cousin,

“EDITH MEYER.”

X.

[From Henry Barton to Mrs. Arbuthnot.]

“July 5th.

“MY DEAR MRS. ARBUTHNOT,

“I went to the wedding to-day to see the last of her. Perhaps I should have done better to keep away, but a singed moth flutters back to the candle. Poor Constance ! I hope she may be happy. If it had been any one else but that cut-throat looking Italian ! But these are the natural sentiments, you will say, of a disappointed lover. Henry Meyer looked very glum. He caught sight of me in the crowd and whispered : ‘This is your doing. I hope you feel proud of it.’ As a matter of fact it is his own wife’s. The seed she has religiously sown in Constance’s mind has borne fruit at last.

“I went up among the rest to shake hands with the bride and congratulate her. Her husband was standing by her side. She changed colour a little when she caught sight of me, and I saw his eyes rest on me with a look of angry suspicion. Well, I am not likely to give him much cause for jealousy. She has soared out of my sphere.

“I think she might have kept my present. It was to Constance le Breton I sent it, not the Princess di San Felice. Her sister returned it with a curt little note signifying that the prince did not care for his wife to receive presents from her male acquaintances. And not a line from Constance herself to soften the refusal.

“This is a selfish letter, but you will excuse it. Kindest and best of friends, you know how I feel. If I had listened to you—but Constance never made a sign. And now it is too late.

“Yours sincerely and gratefully,

“HENRY BARTON.”

XI.

[From Miss Laura Mason, Hôtel Beau Rivage, Ouchy, to Miss Amy Charlton, West Cliff Hotel, Folkestone.]

"MY DEAREST AMY,

"This is paradise. Imagine the most lovely blue lake with trees growing down to the water's edge, water splashing musically against the quays, mountains opposite all bathed in haze, and every now and then a glimpse of snow. I sit all day in the garden. Ethel is hard at work sketching, but I am content to enjoy. We have been very lazy so far about excursions; the weather has been so hot. But to-morrow we are going to Chillon. I don't care about it very much. One dungeon, I fancy, is very much like another, only this one happens to have been celebrated by Lord Byron. But I am longing to see the Dent du Midi. They say it is such a beautiful mountain. We caught a glimpse of it in the train as we passed.

"This is a charming hotel. There is a great cool hall with American chairs, where we sit in the evening when we do not care to go out. The people are not very interesting, except one couple, an Italian prince and his wife on their honeymoon. She is English and very pretty. They dine at a separate table and never speak to any one. She must find it rather dull, I think. People say she gives herself airs. I think myself she is unhappy. She looks very proud and cold and scarcely opens her lips. Her husband is handsome too, but rather fierce-looking, with an aquiline nose and flashing dark eyes. He watches her like a cat does a mouse. Ethel and I have nicknamed them Othello and Desdemona. I wonder what made her marry him. I cannot understand an English girl marrying a foreigner.

"A young Englishman has just arrived who seems rather nice. He sat next to me at luncheon, and we scraped acquaintance. (Ethel and I have insisted on lunching at *table d'hôte*; it is so much more amusing.) Papa knows him by sight. He is a barrister, and his name is Barton.

"I must leave off now. It is time to dress for dinner. Write soon and tell me how you like Folkestone. I wish you were here instead.

"Ever your loving,

"LAURA MASON."

XII.

[From Henry Barton, Ouchy, to Mrs. Arbuthnot, Woodbine Cottage, Shanklin, Isle of Wight.]

"Sept. 2nd.

"MY DEAR MRS. ARBUTHNOT,

"You see I have taken your advice and come abroad for my holiday. This is certainly a most lovely spot. I have seen nothing like it out of Italy. The scenery indeed is distinctly Italian, with a softness and charm that Switzerland as a rule is deficient in. I shall stay here a few days and excursionize about. There is rather a pleasant English family staying in the hotel named Mason—father, mother and two daughters. One of the girls has a look of Constance. The father is one of our leading Q.C.'s, so you see it is a matter of policy as well as of inclination to cultivate their acquaintance.

"I spent a pleasant half-hour this evening wandering round the garden with Laura Mason. She has a sweet voice and a soft sympathetic manner. Once or twice I could almost have fancied it was Constance who stood by my side in the moonlight, listening to my words with an interest that Constance, alas! never showed. They have asked me to go with them to Chillon to-morrow. I accepted. If one cannot get the substance one must try to be content with the shadow. There are other girls in the world, and if I could only give up sighing for the unattainable. Laura Mason is pretty, and good, I am sure. A man might go farther and fare worse.

* * * *

"Constance is here! Coming out of my room just now I met her face to face in the passage. In my surprise I called out her name. Before she could answer her husband appeared on the scene. A terrified look came into her face; she turned away without seeming to recognize me and began walking quickly down the passage. He followed her and laid his hand on her arm. What passed between them I could not hear. He opened a door and they disappeared.

"The look in her face haunts me still. Is it possible that she can be afraid of him? My blood boils at the thought."

XIII.

[From the same to the same.]

"Sept. 3rd.

"I could not sleep last night for thinking of what I told you. This morning I got up early and went out into the garden. There I met Miss Mason, who told me a story that it drives me wild to remember. It seems that Constance's ill-treatment by her husband is the common talk of the hotel. Their maid came up from her supper full of it. She declares that the other night her screams were heard all over the hotel. She came out into the passage, her hair hanging down her back, but he followed her and dragged her back, and they heard distinctly the sound of blows. Most of this, I hope and trust, is servants' exaggeration, but if only one-tenth part be true! Constance, my beautiful Constance, in the hands of a man who ill-treats her! Great heavens! What were we all thinking of to allow this marriage?"

XIV.

[From the same to the same.]

"Sept. 4th.

"Constance came down to luncheon to-day with her eyes red as though she had been crying. This time I was determined to speak to her. I watched my opportunity, and when she rose from the table I rose too and followed her to the door.

"'Constance,' I whispered.

"She started.

"'I must speak to you.'

"She gave a furtive glance round the room. Her husband had stopped to speak to some one.

"'Not here, nor now. I will let you know. Oh, Harry, do not abandon me.'

"Her tone went to my heart. You remember how daring, how self-reliant she used to be. Just then her husband came up to us. He gave me a suspicious glance. I took the bull by the horns.

"'I have had the pleasure of meeting you,' I said, 'at Mrs. Meyer's.'

"'You have the advantage of me, sir,' he answered coldly; 'I do not remember you.'

"I saw by his face that he did, but what could I say? He drew Constance's hand through his arm and marched her off. I looked after them with a sort of helpless rage. After all a man has a right to choose his wife's acquaintances."

XV.

[From the same to the same.]

"Sept. 5th.

"I have seen her at last. This afternoon I was pacing up and down my room like a wild beast in a cage when the chambermaid knocked at the door. She handed me a note. It was from Constance, and contained these words: 'My husband is out. Come. The chambermaid will show you the way.' I crumpled it up and followed the girl down the passage. She opened the door of a sitting-room. Constance was there alone.

"'At last!' I exclaimed. 'Constance, what does this mean?'

"She burst into tears. This nearly maddened me.

"'Stop crying,' I cried, 'unless you want me to kill him.'

"'Oh, Harry,' she sobbed, 'I am so wretched. I am in daily terror of my life. It is a little better now you have come. I feel at any rate that I have a friend at hand. You will not forsake me?'

"Forsake her!

"'He beat me yesterday because you spoke to me. That is nothing. If a man only looks at me he revenges himself upon me. Look there!' She pulled up her sleeve and showed me her arm. 'He did that three nights ago, when I met you in the passage.'

"Her delicate skin was bruised and blackened.

"'Constance,' I exclaimed, beside myself at the sight, 'why do you stand it? You have friends and relations. Why don't you write to them?'

"'How can I? He reads all my letters before I send them. He says a wife should have no secrets from her husband. I had a maid, but he sent her away. He would have no spies, he said, about him. He has gone out now. It must be for something important or he would not have left me. He never lets me out

of his sight if he can help it. He locked me into my room before he went. But he has taught me a little of his own cunning. I waited till he had gone, then rang the bell and told the chambermaid he had taken the key by mistake. I don't suppose she believed me, but I was too wretched to care. And I was determined not to miss the chance of seeing you. She is a good girl, and will not betray me.'

"How long do you think he will be gone?"

"I cannot tell, but some time, I fancy, from his locking me in. He has gone to meet a friend, I believe; a horrible Italian whom we met in Paris. Oh, Harry!" her voice sinking to a terrified whisper. 'I am so frightened of him. He is so horribly strong. Last night he seized me and shook me—I felt like a child in his grasp.'

"She trembled as she spoke at the recollection.

"Constance," I exclaimed, 'why wait for his return? Let me take you away. Let him come back to find you gone.'

"She recoiled.

"You, Harry, in whom I trusted!"

"I mean it in all honour and purity. Let me take you to your cousin. You will be safe under her protection.'

"For a moment I thought she was going to consent. Then she shook her head.

"No, Harry, I dare not. It would not be right. If it were any one else—but you. Think what a handle it would give him against me!"

"But, child," I exclaimed, 'what will you do? You cannot remain here exposed to his brutality. It makes me shudder to think of it.'

"I feel braver now that I have seen you. You will help me, I know.'

"How can I? you refuse my help.'

"No, Harry, I do not," her eyes filling with tears. 'Only you must find some other way.'

"I tried every argument in vain. At last I lost patience.

"Have your own way, then," I said, 'and reap the consequences.'

"I was turning away, but she followed me.

"Harry, dear Harry!" imploringly. 'Do not *you* be angry with me. I dare not do it.'

"Her face changed suddenly, alarmingly. She pushed me towards the door.

"Go, Harry, go, for heaven's sake! I see him coming. Don't let him find you here.'

"And you, Constance?' hanging back. 'Let me stay and protect you.'

"What good could you do? You would only make matters worse.'

"I turned to the door. She held me back.

"Harry,' she said—and there was a strange entreating earnestness in her voice—'if anything should happen to me—if you should never see me again—forgive me and think kindly of me.'

Her words struck like a knell on my heart. I seized her hand.

"Constance,' I cried, 'there is yet time. Think better of it, and come.'

"No,' she answered, snatching her hand from mine. 'Oh, Harry, leave me! Leave me in mercy before he comes!'

"And I obeyed. What else could I do? Yet ever since I have done nothing but reproach myself."

[Telegram from Mrs. Arbuthnot to Henry Barton.]

"Do nothing rash. I am coming out at once. Meet me at the 'Beau Rivage,' Geneva, on Wednesday morning."

XVI.

[From Henry Barton to Mrs. Arbuthnot.]

"Sept. 8th.

"Constance has disappeared. Her husband carried her off very early this morning, before any one was up. The chambermaid told me that the poor lady looked very ill and seemed very unwilling to go. She tried to hang back and say something to her (the maid), but her husband dragged her on. Some message for me, no doubt. It drives me wild to think of her in his power. I had not seen her again since our interview. She had kept her room. They have left no address. I have a faint clue, which I am going to follow up. If nothing comes of it I will meet you to-morrow at Geneva.

"Yours in haste,

"HENRY BARTON."

XVII.

[From Miss Egerton, Brown's Hotel, Dover Street, to Mrs. Egerton, Stoneleigh Park, Essex.]

"Sept. 1st.

"We travelled the whole way back to England with the coffin containing the body of poor Miss le Breton, who was married, you remember, this summer, to the Prince di San Felice. Is it not sad? She was only twenty-two and very beautiful. She died at Geneva after three days' illness. Her cousin, Mrs. Arbuthnot, was with her. They say the prince is broken-hearted, and no wonder. They had only been married eight weeks.

"I hope nobody belonging to me will ever die abroad. It gave me quite a shock to see the coffin brought out like a common packing-case and placed on the deck of the steamer. There it stood all alone while every one landed. I felt inclined to go and stand by it. There were two or three ladies on board in deep mourning—her cousin, I suppose, and her sister, Mrs. Meyer, who, I believe, made up the match."

Into Temptation.

By A. PERRIN.

CHAPTER XX.

THE THIN END OF THE WEDGE.

"Perhaps you did not understand
How lightly flames of love were fanned."—*De Witt Sterry.*

THE next day, Sunday, was one I always looked forward to with dread.

Of course the kacheri was closed, and Andrew conscientiously refrained from doing any work in the house, so he generally spent it at my side reading uninteresting books out loud by way of improving my mind, which he declared had been shamefully neglected.

On Sunday evenings, when we were in the station, Andrew would read service in the kacheri, as Kuttahpore could not boast of a church or a clergyman, and on these occasions Mrs. Herring would conduct the hymns devoid of any accompaniment, and lustily scream a duet with Andrew, who was usually the only person who gave her any perceptible support.

Mrs. Herring, ourselves and the Costellos, with a thin sprinkling of half-caste clerks and native Christians, were all that generally constituted the congregation. I was always afraid to open my mouth to sing in case I should laugh instead; the Costellos stood in a silent black line, too heavily stupid to attempt to exert themselves, and the other members of the congregation had either no hymn books or could never find their places in time to do much towards helping to swell the sound.

On this particular Sunday afternoon Andrew seemed more inclined to find fault with me than usual. Of course the scene the day before was enough to account for this, but I could not help thinking that there must be something wrong with him and that he was not feeling well.

A spirit of revenge tempted me to recommend liver pills, but I refrained, in case he might really be feeling out of sorts. He looked yellow and pinched, and was not so *energetically* disagreeable as usual, though he was certainly not more amiable.

"I think I will ask you to read out loud to me to-day," said Andrew, as we sat down in the drawing-room. "I wonder you never think of offering to do so of your own accord."

"You always say I read so badly," I retorted in an injured voice.

"Then you should be all the more anxious to improve with practice," said Andrew testily. "This is where we left off last Sunday in camp. Now begin, and please pay attention to the punctuation."

The book was Buckle's "History of the Progress of Civilization," and I read on for an hour, with occasional interruptions and corrections from Andrew, who made me read various paragraphs several times over till I did so to his satisfaction.

At last, to my relief, a diversion occurred in the shape of Sir Gerald Daintry's cards. So he had come to call at last, and now he would be obliged to speak to me, as he certainly could not ignore me in my own house. I laid down the book with delight, and wished I could have run to my room for a peep in the glass, but there was no time now, for Sir Gerald was already in the room. He seemed inclined to make himself very agreeable, though Andrew was rather cross at the interruption, and would not help much with the conversation until Sir Gerald asked him some question with reference to pay and promotion in the Civil Service, when he instantly brightened up and talked for nearly half-an-hour, and then pressed Sir Gerald to stay to tea.

To my surprise he accepted, and he and Andrew kept up an animated conversation until it was over.

"Excuse me, my dear fellow," said Andrew pompously, "I must go and look out the books for church this afternoon; I won't be long."

"How do you like India?" I asked stiffly, by way of opening a conversation when Andrew had left the room; "though I dare say you are rather tired of answering that question."

"I don't object to it," he replied, smiling and showing his white even teeth; "you see I have the satisfaction of repeating my reply to a different person each time, and the various effects are rather amusing."

"Why? What do you generally say?"

"That I think England is a much better place, which always seems to cause great offence for some mysterious reason. You

Anglo-Indians will never let any one abuse this country but yourselves."

"You may abuse it as much as you like as far as I am concerned. I simply hate it."

"I thought India was a woman's paradise."

"I could quite understand that if one lived in a large station and could thoroughly enjoy oneself."

"Yes; this is certainly not a spot conducive to much enjoyment for a lady," he said thoughtfully.

"I wonder you care to stay here," I remarked; "it is such a hideous place."

"I had only intended to stay three days," he said slowly, "but I have altered my mind now. I don't know when I shall go away."

I began to think Chatty must be the attraction. What a lucky girl she was. But the idea of a man like Sir Gerald wanting to marry a girl like Chatty Herring seemed too ridiculous to be true.

"Are you wondering why I am staying on in a place like this?" he asked, noticing my perplexed expression.

"Well, I must say——" I began in some confusion.

"Don't you think my brother being here is enough to account for it?"

"No," I said awkwardly.

"You're right, it's not my brother," he said laughing; "but if you really want to know why I am staying on I will tell you next time I see you alone."

I looked at him in astonishment. Why should he choose to confide in me, of all people, whom he had so persistently avoided hitherto.

"Oh, do tell me now," I said eagerly.

He shook his head and laughed provokingly, and just then Andrew entered with a bundle of church books in his hands.

"It's almost time to be going," he announced. "You had better go and get ready, Josie. Will you come to church with us, Daintry?"

"Delighted," murmured Sir Gerald, and shortly afterwards we set off towards the kacheri, which was just outside our gate.

A native was energetically banging a gong, which hung from a tree, with a wooden mallet, making a deafening noise which nobody appreciated but himself, and a little knot of people were

gathered together outside the door awaiting Andrew's arrival as the signal to enter.

Mrs. Herring's face was a study when she saw Sir Gerald by my side.

"Dear me, this is very good behaviour, Sir Gerald. I thought you told me you never went to church," she said.

"It depends on who else is going," said Sir Gerald calmly; and Mrs. Herring at once concluding that he had come to see Chatty, recovered her temper, and even became quite affectionate towards myself.

To my great surprise, there was Mr. Pierce, who hastened forward and explained that he had just got back from camp.

"You're looking so well," he said, as we shook hands; "camp seems to have agreed with you. How did you get on?"

I smiled meaningly at him.

"I took your advice," I said, "but it wasn't much good. I'll tell you about it another time."

With Andrew leading the way, we all trooped into the kacheri, and took our seats in the rows of chairs that had been arranged for the occasion.

I was between Mr. Pierce and Sir Gerald, Chatty having been pushed by her mother into a chair next the latter, while Mrs. Herring herself took up her position behind us.

It was a trying ordeal; the native Christians contributed a strong odour of cocoanut-oil to the ceremony, and Andrew's voice nearly sent me to sleep with its unvarying monotony; the only excitement being the hymns, one of which Mrs. Herring led in too high a key, and finding it an impossibility to reach the upper notes, she left them to our imagination, which sent Chatty into convulsions of silent laughter.

It was a relief to get back into the air, and we all stood for some minutes outside the kacheri door, until Mrs. Herring suggested a walk in the dusk.

She then performed prodigies of manœuvring to get Sir Gerald to walk ahead with Chatty, but the young lady had apparently taken a fancy to Mr. Pierce, whom she carried off almost at a run; and as Andrew had attached himself to her mother, Sir Gerald and I were left to ourselves.

"Now," I said, as we sauntered along, "you can tell me why you mean to stay on here. Are you thinking of getting married?"

"I am afraid not," he answered quietly.

"Why?" I asked with compassion. "Won't she have you?"

"Who?"

"Why, Chatty Herring, of course. There's no other young lady here except Miss Costello."

Sir Gerald burst out laughing.

"What in the world made you think I wanted to marry Chatty Herring?"

"You seemed to like her so much," I said rather blankly; "what else could I think?"

"You mean because I talked so much to her the two days I met you at their house? I did that on purpose."

"What *are* you talking about?" I exclaimed, becoming more and more bewildered.

"If I tell you, you promise not to be angry?"

"Yes. I promise."

"I did it to make you take an interest in me."

"Good heavens!" I said. "So you devoted yourself to Chatty Herring to make *me* take an interest in you?"

"Exactly. You knew perfectly well there was no one to compare with yourself in the station, and that the most natural thing in the world would have been for me to come straight to your side directly I first set eyes on you. If I had done so you wouldn't have cared a snap whether I spoke to you or not."

"And I don't care now," I cried indignantly, though I knew I was not speaking the truth, and that I had been greedily drinking in the flattering words.

"Then I'll go and take the place of Mr. Pierce, who is, apparently, my hated rival at this moment."

Chatty was giggling and ogling, and bumping up against Mr. Pierce in an ecstasy of flirtation.

"Very well," I said carelessly; "go."

"No, I won't. I'll stay here. You know I would rather talk to you than to any one else. Why, you and I are the only two civilized beings in this God-forsaken little hole."

"Not at all," I said, forgetting that Andrew was included in this category; "there is your brother."

A curious look passed over Sir Gerald's face.

"Yes, I had forgotten him; but he is not here now, so please try to imagine that I am my brother. What makes you like him so much?"

"I don't see how any one could help it," I said warmly, for I wished to stand up for Douglas, knowing that Sir Gerald was hard on his faults. "He is so good-natured and amusing, and always ready to put himself out for anybody."

"Lucky devil," said Sir Gerald. "I wonder if you would stick up for me like that behind my back?"

"I don't know you as well as I do your brother."

"No," he said, clenching his teeth, "and I don't intend to leave this place till you do!"

He said this with such vehemence that I looked up at him in astonishment, though I could hardly see his face in the rapidly increasing dusk. What did he mean? and ought I not to be very indignant at such speeches? I knew how to treat Douglas when he tried to talk nonsense, because I knew he did not mean it, but this man seemed so thoroughly in earnest that I was frightened as well as puzzled.

The thick, stifling smoke from a fire some natives were making under a tree, got down my throat and made me cough, and when I recovered my voice Chatty had come to a halt, and we found ourselves making part of a little group in the middle of the road.

"This smoke is enough to make one sick," she exclaimed; "and fancy! Mr. Pierce says he likes it, it makes him think of Scotch whisky."

"There!" whispered Mrs. Herring to me. "Didn't I always say that man drank? Oh, dear! I'm afraid he's fallen in love with Chatty; did you see the way he carried her off from under my very nose?"

Mrs. Herring snorted with rage and apprehension for her darling's future, and as their house was but a few steps further, she hastily said good-night to the company in general, with the exception of Sir Gerald, whose escort she demanded, saying that she and Chatty were much too nervous of stray dogs to go even that distance alone in the evening.

"It's getting very cold," said Andrew shivering, as the trio disappeared in the gloom. "I think I must be in for a go of fever, a thing I haven't had for years."

"You've not been looking well all day, Andrew," I remarked.

"My house is quite close," said Mr. Pierce. "Why not come in and have a dose of quinine in a glass of sherry?"

Andrew jumped at this offer, and we walked to the little white thatched house which Mr. Pierce inhabited.

It was a small bungalow, with one long room running through the middle, which did duty for both dining and drawing room, the latter part being made comfortable with easy-chairs, little tables, books, photographs and papers.

A reading lamp had been lighted, shedding a pleasant glow from one of the tables, and a bright fire crackled cheerfully in the grate.

"Oh, how nice to see a fire," I said, kneeling down in front of it, and spreading out my hands towards the blaze; "it's the first I've seen since I came to India. Why don't we ever have one, Andrew?"

"It's never really necessary," said Andrew, though I could see he was enjoying its unaccustomed warmth, "and our chimneys all smoke."

I glanced at him as the firelight shone full on his face, and noticed how pale and drawn it was, and a feeling of pity for him crept into my heart. He was so lonely and unloved, though it certainly was nobody's fault but his own, and I wondered if he ever looked back or regretted his youth, and if he had loved some girl when he was a young man, who had perhaps treated him cruelly and withered up his heart and soul.

While Mr. Pierce was administering quinine and sherry to Andrew, I took up one of the books on the table nearest me, and was surprised to find that I was holding "Butler's Spelling Primer" in my hand.

"Is this the sort of reading you go in for?" I asked, showing it to Mr. Pierce, who laughed and took it away from me.

"Why have you got it here?" I persisted with unwarrantable curiosity, "and here's actually a half-filled copy-book. Mr. Pierce, do explain this mystery."

"Well," said Mr. Pierce reluctantly, "you see some of these half-caste clerks and native Christians have got children who grow up utterly uneducated, and get no chance in consequence in the world, when their parents die and leave them destitute, as they usually do. So when I'm in the station, I have a little kind of class for an hour or so in the evenings, and just teach them to write and read."

"Oh! how awfully good of you," I said, looking at him in astonishment.

"Why can't their parents teach them?" growled Andrew, who was almost asleep from the combined effects of the fire and his dose.

"You see they have so little time. They are in office all day long and are too tired or lazy to teach during the few hours they have to themselves, and the mothers are generally too ignorant; so that unless somebody takes them in hand they are never taught anything, and what costs me nothing may make all the difference in the world to the poor little wretches in the future."

"I thought you hated children," I said, holding up the copy-book between my face and the fire.

"So I do, but that doesn't signify. They're too much afraid of me to give any trouble."

"I can't understand any one voluntarily having *anything* to do with children."

Mr. Pierce made no answer, but his face clouded, and I wondered if he had expected me to make an offer of helping him to educate some of the greasy, saffron-coloured little imps that pervaded the gardens of the clerks' bungalows.

Most probably he was disappointed that I had not done so, but I really could not make up my mind to commit myself, for I knew that if I made a promise in a weak moment, Mr. Pierce would relentlessly hold me to it directly we settled down for the hot weather. No. I would risk losing his good opinion of me, if he had one, and somehow I did not feel nearly so anxious to gain it now as I had been before going into camp.

He was much too good, I decided, and it was impossible to rise to such a level of perfection. I felt unreasonably angry with him, principally because I was ashamed of myself, and knew perfectly well that I deserved the reproach I saw shining in his large dark eyes when he said good-night to me.

CHAPTER XXI.

A KINDLED FLAME.

"——— alone I wait;
Loss seems too bitter—gain too late."—*H. Jackson.*

ANDREW ate no dinner that night, and went to bed early, saying he was decidedly feverish and out of sorts, and as he seemed no better the next morning, I suggested sending for Dr. Herring, to which he consented.

"You had better stay in bed, Andrew, till he comes," I said, when I had sent the note.

"Of course," he replied, to my astonishment, "I never dreamt of getting up; I'm not one of those people who play tricks with themselves. When I am ill I do my best to get well again."

He was evidently prepared to become an invalid to any extent, and I felt quite nervous about him until Dr. Herring arrived, and, after seeing my husband, informed me that it was only a chill, and nothing to be alarmed about.

"He must keep quiet for a day or two; he has a little fever, but he'll be all right very shortly."

Andrew was rather indignant at this verdict; he had made up his mind he was very ill, and like most men who usually enjoy robust health, imagined he was much worse than was really the case.

"Herring's an old fool," he confided to me; "past his work. There's no doubt about that. He evidently doesn't in the least know what's the matter with me."

"Oh, yes, Andrew," I said, by way of consolation, "I am sure he is right about you; he says there's nothing really the matter."

"What?" shouted Andrew, "do you suppose I should be lying here neglecting my work if there was nothing the matter with me? I tell you, Josephine, I'm in a high fever, and I shouldn't be the least surprised if it turned to typhoid."

"Oh! Andrew, I hope not."

"I can quite believe that. No doubt you are thinking what a trouble you will have nursing me."

"Would you like some soup made?" I asked.

"Good gracious! do you mean to say you haven't even ordered any soup for me? Of course I shall want soup, and barley water, and all kinds of things. Now don't go away. Send for the cook and give your orders here."

All day long I sat by Andrew's bed listening to, and sympathizing with, his complaints. I read to him, ran about the house fetching things for him, and obeyed his contradictory commands until I felt worn out and impatient. He certainly was the most trying patient to nurse that ever existed, and was not in the least grateful to me for my unwearying efforts to please him. He was very angry because Dr. Herring did not come to see him in the evening, and after dinner he told me to go

across to the Herrings' house and say he wished to see him ; I suggested sending a servant, but he said he would rather I went myself as then he would be obliged to come.

"I shall report that fellow to government," he said ; "the idea of his never coming near me this evening ! I might die in the night for all he cares, or any one else for the matter of that."

"But, Andrew, I'm sure you're no worse than you were this morning."

"Be quiet, Josephine !" exclaimed Andrew, his face crimson with rage. "I should like to know how you can tell how I feel ? Go and fetch Dr. Herring at once, and tell him I'm very much worse."

Remonstrance was useless, so I set out, rather glad of the walk than otherwise, as it had been a very trying day, and the bright moonlight and cold night air soothed my temper and cooled my burning forehead.

The Herrings had just finished dinner when I arrived, and Chatty was seated at the piano screaming popular ballads, while her admiring parents were established one on each side of her, nodding their heads in approval, and beating time to the music with their feet.

I explained my errand, and Dr. Herring, who never walked anywhere, immediately ordered his trap to be got ready.

Chatty had sprung up from the piano when she saw me.

"Oh, you dear old thing," she cried, running forward to embrace me ; "how nice of you to come over yourself. Do sit down and have a talk. Do you know pa's teaching me to talk Hindustani, and I know loads of words ? It's a first-rate language ; you always feel as if you were swearing."

"Chatty, my *dear* —" began Mrs. Herring.

"*Chup*,* ma," shouted Chatty, airing her new accomplishment, while Mrs. Herring smiled indulgently, and became submissively silent.

"I can't stay," I said, as soon as there was a lull in the storm of Chatty's conversation ; "my husband wouldn't like me to leave him for long."

"Poor Mr. Boscawen," remarked Mrs. Herring significantly, "I do hope he has all he wants. Do you know how to make gruel, my dear ?"

* Hold your tongue.

"No," I replied, with a vivid recollection of Mrs. Herring's achievements in that line.

"Ah! I thought not," she continued, "and the poor dear man really *ought* to have gruel. I know he is not seriously ill, but that's just where the beauty of gruel comes in. It's the very thing when people are a little seedy."

"My husband seems rather nervous about himself," I said, "but I don't think he's very bad. I am looking after him well."

"Oh, no doubt you are," said Mrs. Herring incredulously; "but still I think I will run over to-morrow evening and see what he's getting, and perhaps make him a drop of gruel."

"Thank you," I said; "I am sure he will be very glad."

I pitied Andrew from the bottom of my heart with such a prospect before him, and then refusing Dr. Herring's offer of a lift, as it was such a short distance, I said "good-night" and started off again.

It was a beautiful night, though intensely cold. The dust on the road, and in fact almost everywhere, for Kuttahpore was a dry, sandy place, looked like frost in the moonlight, and there was a still, cold hush in the air, which was broken now and then by the weird wail of a jackal, or the shuffling of a traveller's shoes as he passed along, looking like a ghost, rolled up in his white cotton wrapper.

I walked sharply along the road until I came to the turning which led to our gate, and there I was stopped by the figure of a man, whom I recognized as Sir Gerald Daintry. A brown bowler hat was tilted over his nose, and he wore an ulster with a cape to it over his dress clothes; a little blue curl of smoke rose from the cigarette he was holding in his hand.

"What are you doing here?" I exclaimed.

"Same to you," he replied laughing.

I explained that I had been to fetch Dr. Herring, and was now hurrying back to my husband.

"I came out for a little turn and a smoke," he said. "That young heathen Douglas always goes sound asleep after dinner, and I hate sitting in a room alone with my own thoughts, so I came out to walk them off."

"Are they so very disagreeable, then?"

"They were to-night. Would you like to hear them?"

"Yes, but I haven't time to wait now. You must tell me

another time. You know I haven't heard yet why you are staying on."

"Yes, you have; I told you. Shall I see you anywhere to-morrow? Do you never go out in the mornings?"

"I don't think I shall get out to-morrow," I said hastily—my voice was shaking a little—"my husband is ill in bed, but perhaps I may go out in the evening. Now I really *must* go. Good-night, Sir Gerald."

I passed him rapidly and turned in at the gate.

Had he told me why he was staying on? My heart beat fast, and a little thrill of delight shot through it as I remembered that he had said he did not intend to leave Kuttahpore till I knew him as well as I did his brother. Surely it was not on *my* account that he was staying on? Then I scolded myself for being so conceited as to imagine that a fashionable man of the world like Sir Gerald could ever bestow more than a passing thought on a dowdy, insignificant person like myself, buried away in an obscure little up-country station in India. How different we must all look to what he was accustomed to. How he must laugh at us all to himself, and what amusing descriptions he would give of us to his friends in England. Yet—why did he stay on? I wished I had not told him that I might be going out the next evening. Perhaps he would think I wanted him to meet me. I would not stir from the house the whole day, I—At this point in my reverie I bumped against Dr. Herring, who was just descending the steps of the verandah as I approached them, and this brought me to my sober senses.

"How is Andrew?" I asked.

"Oh, he'll be all right, my dear lady. Don't you worry yourself. He's always like this when he gets seedy. I know Boscawen of old. I'll look in again to-morrow. He's got rid of the fever, and you'll find he'll pass a good night."

He climbed painfully into his trap and drove off, while I hastily found my way to Andrew, who greeted me with severe reproaches for having been away so long.

He insisted that he was going to be awake all night, and that I must sit up with him, but luckily nature opposed his wishes and he slept fairly soundly, while I naturally passed a restless night, as I was expecting him to wake every minute and find me asleep.

The next day he developed a bad cold in his head, which, to him, was a most alarming symptom. Dr. Herring said it was only the result of the chill, which was passing off in this manner, but it was quite sufficient to render him more capricious and exacting than ever.

I spent anything but a pleasant day. Andrew would allow no one to bring his food to him but myself, and was perpetually requiring something that was not at hand, so that from seven o'clock in the morning till past five in the evening I scarcely sat down once, and when Mrs. Herring appeared to pay Andrew a visit, I welcomed her with positive joy.

Taking absolutely no notice of me, she went up to Andrew's bedside with the deepest concern in her manner.

"My *dear* Mr. Boscawen, how very unfortunate this is," she began.

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Herring," said Andrew fretfully; "I'm very seedy. I had fever all yesterday, and now to-day I've got a terrible cold. I assure you I'm aching from head to foot."

"Dear, dear," said Mrs. Herring, shaking her head, "you must keep up your strength, whatever you do. Now, what have you had to-day?"

"Andrew," I broke in, unable to stand this any longer, "if you don't mind, I will just run out for a little fresh air. I feel so tired. I will come back directly Mrs. Herring goes."

"Very well," said Andrew ungraciously, "I know you've been fidgeting to get away all day."

Without waiting to hear any more, I got my hat and a wrap, for the evenings were very chilly, and hastened out. It was growing dark, and as I walked down the drive the air felt raw and biting.

I thought of my encounter with Sir Gerald the night before, and wondered when I should see him again. There was something wonderfully fascinating about him, with his handsome face and well-dressed figure. I thought of him all the way down to the gate, and when I reached it *there* he was, sauntering down the road, twirling a cane in his hand, and the usual cigarette between his lips. I felt inclined to turn and run back to the house, but he had seen me and quickened his pace.

"Here you are at last," he said, taking my hand in his and letting it fall after a firm pressure.

"What do you mean?" I said, growing red at the recollection of my having told him I might be going out this evening.

"Only that I have been walking about here for the last two hours on the chance of seeing you come out, and now my patience has been rewarded."

The blood bounded through my veins, and my cheeks burned still more hotly.

"I want to tell you something," he said after a short pause.

"What is it?" I whispered. I could not have spoken out loud, my lips felt dry and parched, and there seemed to be a big lump in my throat.

"Won't you come away from the road?" he said, looking round him; "we can't talk comfortably here."

We entered the gate and strolled into a little shrubbery which had been planted well away from the house. Then he suddenly turned and faced me.

"I am going away," he said abruptly.

"Why?" I gasped, with a sinking at my heart.

"Because," he said, with a little quiver in his voice, "I am afraid to stay. I'm afraid of *you*."

"Afraid of *me*!" I repeated in amazement.

"Yes. When I first saw you at Mrs. Herring's I made up my mind that I would stay here any length of time; I never thought of the future. And then, when I saw that you were—well, a little *vexed* at my apparent preference for that little fool Chatty, I was all the more determined. But *now*—I know that I must go."

"If I stay," he continued, looking steadily into my eyes, "I shall fall in love with you, Josephine. I am afraid I've done it already. I can't help it. I think of your face every hour of the day, and dream of it all night."

I made no answer. I was trembling from head to foot. I had never heard such words before, and I suddenly recognized the fact that I had been craving and yearning to hear them. Love had come into my life at last, but only to leave it again as cold and bare as it had found it. I must go back to Andrew, to complaints and petty trials, to economy and daily routine, a blank before me with nothing bright or sweet to look for in the long weeks, months and years I should have to struggle through.

I picked a leaf off a tree and examined it carefully to hide the tears that would well up into my eyes.

Sir Gerald came nearer to me.

"Are you angry?" he said gently. "I ought not to have told you, I know — Look at me, Josephine."

"Look at me," he said again, and as I raised my eyes in mute obedience two large drops fell from them.

"What is it?" he cried, seizing my hands. "Why are you crying? Oh! my little girl, shall I stay? Shall I stay?"

A rumble of wheels fell on my ears and I started away in consternation. It was Mrs. Herring leaving the house. Could she see us from the drive?

"Oh! go, please," I said; "don't let her see us."

He understood what I meant at once.

"I will be here to-morrow," he said, pressing my hand hard, and then hastily turned towards the opposite side of the garden so that he should avoid Mrs. Herring's carriage, which was rumbling down the drive.

I went back to the house like one in a dream.

Could it be true that this man really loved me? And did I love him too? If not, why did I feel such agonies of despair at the thought of his going away? Why did I long so feverishly to see him again?

Andrew was calling me querulously, and I went to him slowly, almost as if I was in a trance. I put his feet into mustard and water, I tied flannel wraps round his head and chest, I administered hot brandy and water to him when he was settled for the night, and all the time I was recalling Gerald's voice and the look in his eyes, and when I went to bed myself I fell asleep to the tune of "Shall I stay? Shall I stay?" which coursed backwards and forwards through my brain all night long.

(To be continued.)

Who's the Woman?

By S. SELOUS,
Author of "ANGELA'S MARRIAGE," etc., etc.

I.

WHEN John Brown became tutor to young Harry Hastings at a salary of eighty pounds a year (which he considered handsome), he never imagined that one day he would become a wealthy man. The son of a poor artist who had left nothing but bad pictures and bad debts behind him, what could he expect but a life of penury, cheered by the enlivening prospect of ending it in the Thames or the workhouse? With such gloomy anticipations as these, a tutorship at eighty pounds a year appeared a perfect mine of wealth to John Brown, and to prove his gratitude for it he devoted himself heart and soul to the sowing of classic and mathematical seed in his pupil's brain. Young Harry did not take kindly to anything his mentor taught him; his brain was like that wonderful hat of the conjuror's, which, though you may fill it to the brim with rings and watches, refuses to produce anything but rabbits. The fine classical and mathematical crop that Brown had so carefully sown, the good solid wheat and barley, as you may say, could never be induced to grow, while tares and thistles, as Brown considered all tastes for such things as betting, racing and acting, flourished and grew apace, in spite of careful and persistent weeding.

And yet there was nothing particularly bad about the boy—he was a nice young fellow enough, and constant intercourse with an absolutely high-minded, truthful, honourable man (though a trifle dull withal), such as his tutor, insensibly strengthened all the latent good in him. Harry's parents had systematically neglected their son for the sake of society; he had always been snubbed by his father and kept out of sight by his mother, who did not care to own to the possession of a great hulking boy of seventeen; consequently all the love and hero worship that his nature was capable of feeling was bestowed upon kind, honest John Brown.

If John succeeded in nothing else he succeeded in implanting a wonderful amount of love and admiration for himself in his pupil's wayward heart.

Brown's tutorship extended over two years, then young

Hastings flung off his mental leading strings, went off to Africa to shoot big game—and disappeared as completely from the elder man's life as though he had borrowed money of him.

And now a curious thing occurred—the one great stroke of luck of John Brown's quiet, plodding life. An old maiden aunt died. She had always been considered miserably poor, but on her death it was found that she had managed to scrape together no less than two thousand pounds. This money she left to her nephew John, and it formed the foundation stone on which he reared his large fortune. It floated him into the Stock Exchange, it bought him a partnership, it gave him a fair start in life; after that his perfect integrity and good business head did the rest; his business flourished, his speculations succeeded, and in the course of ten years he found himself a wealthy man. Brown took a house in Mayfair; it was described as a "bijou residence," and rated as a diamond of the first water; but rents and rates were matters of indifference to the successful stock-broker. All he wanted now was a wife, and it did not take him long to find one. He fell deeply in love with the daughter of a friend on the Stock Exchange; she accepted him, and they were married in a few months. Alice Benton, now Alice Brown, was a beautiful woman; she was tall and fair and calmly classical—one of those happy beings that have their features and emotions well under control, and never look either too hot or too cold.

Brown adored her, and she accepted his adoration in the same calm, matter-of-course way in which she had accepted himself. She was faultless in his eyes, a being to look up to and reverence; they were an extremely happy couple.

They had been married about two years, and John Brown was as much in love with his wife as ever: more than ever, perhaps, on this particular day on which our story opens, for she had been away from him for some weeks, and her absence was becoming intolerable. It was June, and things were so busy in the City that Brown was unable to leave London, but he had sent his wife down to the north as it was unbearably hot in town. She was returning the next day, but as Brown walked slowly down the crowded street towards Pursell's, he wondered how he should get through all those long intervening hours.

A vigorous clap on the back and a hearty, "Hallo! old fellow; who would have thought to see *you* here?" effectually aroused him.

He started, and looked up into a handsome and strangely-familiar face. It was Harry Hastings; though his fair skin was burnt almost black by tropical suns, and a heavy moustache shaded his lips; though there were lines on his face, and all the change there that twelve years of living entail, Brown recognized his former pupil.

"Harry—my dear boy! Where have you dropped from?"

The two men exchanged a hearty shake of the hand; they were genuinely glad to meet again.

"Where are you off to?" asked Harry, linking his arm through Brown's; "Pursell's, I suppose—I see it's grub time. Come to my rooms and grub with me. I've got diggings in Holborn; come along."

The young man hailed a hansom and Brown got meekly in; he was busy, but business must give way when old friends turn up from the Antipodes. Hastings' rooms were luxuriously furnished; his cook a first-class one, his wines extremely select, his cheroots of the finest brand.

"Come, light up, old fellow," said Harry, cigar in mouth; "you won't get tobacco like that every day." He threw himself back in his luxurious arm-chair, his hands plunged in his pockets, his feet tilted against the mantelpiece. "There's nothing like these cheroots for drowning care—deuce take the old brute! And now tell me what you've been doing all these years, Brown—fallen on your feet, eh? Made your pile?"

"Yes, I've made my pile—but I'm only an old fogey now, Harry, a respectable stockbroker, such as all novelists love to have a fling at—and a perfectly uninteresting person. Let's hear *your* experiences. Where have you wandered to since you gave up your affectionate tutor twelve years ago?"

"Oh, all over the shop—Africa, India, Australia, America—I've tried them all and am tired of them all. I'm sick of African fevers and Indian tigers and American beauties, so I'm giving England a turn. England seems panning out better just now, but—I wish to heaven I had never come here!" The last words broke from him with curious energy.

Brown sighed. How the young man had changed! What had become of the frank, happy boy who had enjoyed his life so thoroughly and made such a fearful hash of the Latin verbs? Dead and gone—buried under the pitiless weight of twelve years of life.

"There's something troubling the boy," thought Brown, who still considered himself in the light of mentor to the young man.

Hastings was certainly ill at ease; his manner was restless; his eyes shifted uncomfortably before Brown's kind look.

John laid his hand gently on his arm. "Something's wrong, Harry, my lad—what is it?"

Harry started, and stirred uneasily under the other's touch. His brown cheeks turned crimson—he hung his head shamefacedly.

"Yes, something's wrong," he said, looking down confusedly at the Persian carpet. "I'm in a mess—when is a fellow ever *out* of a mess, I should like to know! I came a cropper over the Derby last month—always was fond of betting, *you* know, Brown—and—I'm down on my luck—all to pieces, don't you know."

He plunged his hands deeper into his trousers pockets. His half-smoked cheroot lay smouldering on the floor. Brown picked it up.

"You are trying to put me off, and making a mess of it, Harry," he said quietly. "You've got something on your mind, something more than a cropper over the Derby. I'm a man of the world, and you can't deceive me. Who's the woman?"

The young man started. "What the devil's that to you?" he growled, then, recovering himself, "There is no woman—I wish you wouldn't startle a fellow with such deuced awkward questions. What woman should there be? I don't know why you should catechize me like this. Upon my word, Brown, if it were any one but you I should call it d——d impertinent."

Harry paced up and down the room like an angry young lion. Brown moved towards the door.

"I am sorry to have offended you, Harry. I—I wanted to be your friend, but as you take it in this spirit——" He paused and came back a few steps. "I can't leave you like this, Harry, dear lad; you want a friend—let me help you."

Harry looked up into John Brown's kind, gentle face, and his anger melted. He took the other's extended hand and pressed it warmly.

"Sorry I was angry, old chap. You are right; your worldly wisdom surprises me. There *is* a woman. I'm in a devil of a mess, and heaven knows how I shall get out of it. I—I can't tell you about it now—no time—I promised to meet Dicky Jones at the club. Come in next week, old fellow, and look me up."

II.

HARRY HASTINGS looked up from his letters with a bright smile of welcome.

"Here you are at last, Brown; awfully glad to see you." He put away his unfinished letter with a curious look of confusion on his handsome face. "I—I was just writing to—to her, you know."

"And who is she? Who *is* the woman?"

"Ah! that's my secret—and hers," said the young man. "I have *some* sense of honour, you know, though I don't suppose you will think I can have much of that about me when I tell you I'm in love with a married woman. You are so much better than most fellows, you know, that I don't expect much pity from you, old man."

John Brown sighed.

"I am sorry for you, my lad, and for her. Does she love you?"

"She tells me so."

"How long has this been going on?"

Harry shifted restlessly in his chair.

"Oh, for years! I'll tell you all about it from the beginning.

I met her out in India ages ago, when she was a lovely girl of seventeen, and I tumbled head over ears in love with her, and she with me; she tells me now she has always loved me. If I had proposed to her at once it would have been all right, but—but it does seem a plunge for a fellow to bind himself for life when he's only one-and-twenty, and—and I funk'd it. I was a whole week making up my mind to propose, and before I had quite decided I got knocked out of time by a tiger and landed for six months in a hospital. When I got on my feet again she had gone back to England, and I didn't follow her. Well, I never saw her again until a month or two ago, then, as ill luck would have it, I went down to see some friends in the country, and *she* was staying at a neighbouring house. I met her out walking one day—of course I knew her at once; she was lovelier than ever—ripened, matured, and all that sort of thing, you know—and I felt I loved her as much as ever. I told her so, too, never guessing but that she was as single as I am, and then she blushed and sighed and cried a little, and told me she was married. Of course I ought to have gone away at once, never seen her again, but she looked at me so sweetly, Brown, and admitted with so many tears that

she didn't love her husband, that she wasn't happy, that—that deuce take me if I could tear myself away."

"Of course you couldn't," said Brown grimly. "I suppose you expected her to be brave for you both and point out your duty to you. Well, is she in London now?"

"Yes."

"And you see her often?"

"Nearly every day."

"And her husband—what does he think of this?"

"I have never seen him. She won't even tell me who or what he is—and I don't care—it's all the better. It's a bad business, Brown, and I wish to God I was out of it."

"Then get out of it, Harry; it's in your own hands. Leave England at once; it is your only chance."

The young man bent his head on his hands and groaned.

"I can't—I can't—I love her. And she is so lonely and unhappy! It would be brutal to leave her all alone with that husband of hers."

"Is he unkind to her?"

"Oh, she never says that—but, but she implies a good deal, don't you know. She never loved him, you see, though she has tried hard to do her duty. He is slow and dull and uninteresting and all that sort of thing; a regular old buffer, I suppose. Poor girl! she says her life would be miserable without me; how can I leave her?"

"Then where will this end? Oh, my boy, where are you drifting to?"

"The Divorce Court, I suppose," said Harry recklessly. "Some day I imagine we shall make a bolt of it—and then ——"

"And then you will realize what it is to ruin three lives. If you love this woman you will give her up."

"I do love her, but I won't give her up!" burst out Harry. "It's no use preaching, old man; I'm not good enough; I can't rise to the practice."

John Brown was silent a few moments, thinking. He pitied the young man; what could he do to save him? A sudden thought struck him; Harry had never had a happy home. During his wandering existence he could have seen but little of domestic life: what could he know of the sacredness of the tie between husband and wife—that tie that he was doing his best

to break? Who could tell but that a glimpse into a happy home might arouse some of the latent good in him —

"Look here, Harry," said Brown abruptly. "I'm not going to preach—I see it's no use. Come home to dinner with me instead and see my wife—the very sight of a good woman and a happy wife is good for a man in your frame of mind. Come and talk to Alice—she is the best medicine I can recommend you."

Harry started.

"I didn't know you were married, Brown; 'pon my word I didn't. Happy man!"

John smiled, a smile of trust and happiness that lit up his rugged face into positive beauty.

"I *am* a happy man—thanks to Alice; when I think of my own good fortune in having such a wife it makes me very pitiful to you poor bachelors."

He took out his watch, a large gold timepiece as absolutely reliable as himself.

"Half-past six—we dine at seven. Come, Hastings, it doesn't take more than twenty minutes to get to Curzon Street—aristocratic neighbourhood, isn't it? I daresay you've often driven past our home—Bijou House, and a gem of a place it is! If there are two things I am proud of they are my wife and my home. You are not going to do any more writing, Harry? we shall only just be in time for dinner."

Harry Hastings was standing at his desk, busily arranging papers, and it was quite a perceptible time before he answered without turning his head.

"Very sorry, but I really can't come to-night; I—I've an engagement. Some other time I shall be delighted to make—your wife's—acquaintance."

Brown was quite *distract* that evening; his thoughts wandered to his old pupil with tiresome persistency. He hardly noticed that Alice wore a new and bewitching tea-gown; he did not see that though her eyes were fixed on her book she never turned a page.

Alice, too, was *distract*, but presently she yawned and looked up at her husband with a slightly unamiable expression on her calm fair face.

"What on earth are you thinking of, John? Do you know that you are a very dull companion this evening?"

John started out of his reverie.

"Am I, dearest? I know I'm a dull old fellow. I was thinking of my old pupil, Harry Hastings. I've often talked to you about him, you know, and if you remember, I met him last week in the City ——"

"Yes, I remember," said Alice indifferently, picking up the book which had slipped from her hand. "Well, why 'poor' Harry Hastings? I thought he was a very rich young man."

"He is a very unhappy man just now; he's got into an unfortunate entanglement with a married woman ——"

"Really? did he tell you so?"

"Yes—he told me; it appears he met her years ago in India."

"And who is the woman?"

"He refused to tell me—and he was right. Whoever she may be I pity her—and him."

He took his wife's pretty white hand in his and looked at her fondly.

"Ah, Alice, if there were more women like you the world would be a very different place."

She drew her hand quickly away, a sudden flush of colour on her pale cheeks.

"Don't be foolish, John; you run my rings into me—we are not on our honeymoon."

Brown felt a trifle chilled.

III.

SOME weeks passed, and Brown saw nothing more of young Hastings. He called at his rooms several times, but never found him in. He wrote and repeated his invitation to dinner, but Harry was deep in engagements and could not spare his friend an evening for weeks to come.

"Poor Harry," said John to his wife, "I am anxious for him. He's going to the devil rapidly—he knows it and he's ashamed to see me—poor unhappy boy!"

"I don't know that he needs your pity, John," said Alice, without raising her eyes from the toy terrier on her lap; "I daresay he is happier going to the devil in his own way than he would be if he led an absolutely virtuous and uneventful life."

"For awhile, perhaps; but for how long?"

Alice shrugged her shoulders.

"What does Tennyson say? 'Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay!' Anything is better than dulness."

John looked at his wife a little anxiously; there was an unusual ring in her voice, a touch of bitterness that jarred upon him.

"My dear, are *you* a trifle dull?" he asked anxiously. "Perhaps it is a little slow for you to be all day alone here, while I am away in the City; I wonder what I can do to make your life a little pleasanter. Let me see, business is slack just now; what do you say to a week at Paris?"

Alice looked up at him quickly; it was a hot day, and the heat had made her unusually pale.

"You are very good, John, but—I don't care for Paris. I am quite happy—as I am; I am not in the least dull."

She smiled at him, and that smile completely dispelled any vague anxiety he had begun to entertain on his wife's account. But his anxiety for Harry was not so easily dissipated. The young man possessed an extraordinary power of winning affection, and he had won his old tutor's heart completely. He took as much interest in him as though he were a younger brother, and Brown determined he would make one more effort to save him. That evening he had promised to dine at his club with an old friend who had returned unexpectedly from India. Under ordinary circumstances, Brown would have gone on after dinner to the theatre and not have returned till late; but, to-night, he hurried away from the club soon after eight, and reached Harry's lodgings before nine. Colonel Holt had grumbled a little, but an irresistible impulse drove John towards his friend.

"Mr. Hastings is out, sir," said the servant.

"Then I'll go up and wait till he comes in."

Brown had seen a light in Harry's window, and convinced that the man was lying, according to orders, pushed his way past him and went quickly upstairs. He opened the door gently. The room was in confusion; the table was strewn with papers; on the floor lay a portmanteau, strapped and labelled. Harry was sitting at his desk, busily writing. He started up with an exclamation as John entered, his cheeks turning from red to white and from white to red again.

"Brown, *you* here! I thought——" He broke off with a gasp, staring at John with as horror-stricken a face as though he had been a ghost.

Brown glanced quickly from the young man's pale, changing face to the portmanteau, and from the portmanteau to the scattered papers on table and floor.

"So you've made the last plunge, Harry. You are going, to-night, with her."

Harry had recovered himself a trifle. He plunged his hands into his pockets, looking doggedly down at his pointed boots :

"Yes, I'm going, to-night, with her."

"And where to?"

"Paris."

Brown spurned the portmanteau with his foot.

"To Paris—and where else? To the devil, Harry! To ruin, to disgrace, to shame; and you are dragging her with you!"

"I know it, but it's too late now to think of that."

"It is not too late. Save yourself; save *her*."

"She doesn't want to be saved. She loves me, I tell you."

"Now, perhaps. But how long will that love last when she realizes what she is? and what you are. How can she love you when she remembers that you have betrayed another man; that you have ruined his life, made his home desolate? And you. Can you love a woman capable of such baseness? Love founded on ingratitude and crime *cannot* last. And when love has gone, what have you left? You cannot honour or respect one another; each must feel how vile the other is! What will become of you? Oh! Harry, my dear boy, for God's sake think before you face such a future!"

Harry turned fiercely away.

"I have thought of it all. I've thought till I'm nearly mad. I know my future; it's a damned future, and I deserve it. Why did you come here, Brown? I never meant to see you again. I don't deserve your pity or interest. I don't deserve it, I tell you! For heaven's sake go! You don't know. You don't know. You are driving me mad; you are torturing me."

Great drops stood out upon the young man's forehead; his face was livid.

"If I had only met you three months ago, before I saw *her*, I should have been saved. If I had only met your wife. Look here, Brown, don't forget this: I never knew you were married, you know, until—until it was too late. You—you won't forget that, will you?"

Harry spoke wildly, almost incoherently, and Brown looked at him, puzzled; he was an unimaginative man.

"I don't know what you mean, Harry. What has my marriage to do with—with this?" and he kicked the portmanteau again.

Hastings flung himself into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"Why don't you go? Why don't you go?" he cried, his voice coming out in muffled gasps. "I tell you I'm a brute—a beast; you'll be sorry some day you ever spoke to me. And yet I have struggled—I have, indeed—but the temptation's too strong for me. Go away, Brown; go!"

He looked up and met the elder man's kindly, pitying gaze, and started up with a cry.

"Don't look at me like that! You torture me! I tell you I'm in hell!"

Brown put a strong hand on each of the young man's shoulders and pushed him back into his chair.

"I am not going yet."

"It's no use talking——"

"But I mean to talk. Look here, Harry, have you ever thought of this unhappy woman's husband?"

"I told you I had never met him."

"Think of the wrong you are about to do him. He has never injured you, and you are going to blast his whole life. Harry, I am a married man; I know what it is to have a happy home and a dear wife. Alice and I love each other, we live for each other, we honour one another—we are happy. It—it seems almost a sacrilege to imagine such a thing possible of—of Alice, but just let us try and imagine for a moment that—that she, my wife, learnt to love another man—some handsome young fellow like yourself—and—and that one night I returned to find her—gone."

"Well," said Hastings hoarsely, "what would you do?"

"I should shoot myself," said Brown simply.

Harry's eyes met his; for a moment they looked at one another in silence.

"If this other man loves his wife as I love mine, he will do as I should do. Harry, dear lad, would you have his blood upon your head? Oh, my boy, save yourself this crime!"

There was a long silence. Harry shrunk back into his chair

trembling. Brown watched him anxiously. The ticking of the clock was loudly perceptible in the quiet room.

At last Harry rose unsteadily to his feet; his face looked drawn and sunken, there were tears in his eyes.

"You have won the day, old man," he said in a curiously toneless voice; "I'll go back to Africa."

"Thank God!" said John Brown.

Harry went to his desk, scribbled a few hasty lines, directed an envelope, then rang for the servant and gave the note to him.

"Deliver this at once," he said. "Take a cab and drive fast." The man went off with a bewildered look.

"There's a train for Southampton at six o'clock in the morning, Brown. I shall take that—my things are all packed—I'm quite ready. Are you going home now?"

"Yes."

"Don't go yet. Wait here while I write a few letters. I—I like to have you here."

John took a chair in silence, and for more than an hour no sound was heard in the room but the aggressive ticking of the clock and the scratching of Hastings' pen.

The clock struck eleven, and Harry laid down his pen.

"You can go now. Good-bye. I shall never see you again. Good-bye."

John grasped the young man's hand in both his own.

"Good-bye, dear lad, and God bless you."

Harry dropped his head down upon the table with something like a sob, and John went slowly to the door. A piece of crumpled paper lying at his feet attracted his attention. He picked it up mechanically—it was a letter in a woman's hand. He was about to throw it away, but a second glance at the handwriting caused him to put it quickly in his pocket. He closed the door behind him and went out into the street, walked rapidly along for some moments, then stopped under a gas lamp and read the letter through. It was very short.

"DEAREST,—I shall be ready this evening at ten o'clock. Come for me; my husband will be out till late, so it is quite safe. Oh, how slowly the hours go until I see you again! How can I have lived all these years without you?"

That was all—the letter was unfinished and unsigned.

* * * * *

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when John Brown reached his home. There were lights in the drawing-room ; he went in. Alice was sitting up for him ; she was seated in a luxuriously-cushioned arm-chair, her fair hair falling loose upon her shoulders, her head bent over a book. She wore a loose gown of some soft white material, her cheeks and lips were white too, she had a very ghost-like look, seen in the dim light of the shaded lamp.

She glanced up quickly as her husband entered ; her face looked drawn and hard, the blue had gone out of her eyes, leaving them pale and dull.

"How late you are, John."

"Yes, I have spent a very painful evening."

"Really? How?"

"I went to Harry's rooms. I found that entanglement I told you of had come to a crisis, and——"

"Well?" as he paused.

"Well, to make a long story short, I prevailed on him to give up this unhappy woman and go to Africa instead."

"She will thank you, I am sure," said Alice in a low, hard voice.

"I think she will—some day."

Brown leant against the mantelpiece opposite his wife ; it had been a hard evening for him ; he looked suddenly old, his kind face was very sad, his white lips dry and tremulous. Alice moved restlessly in her comfortable chair, then leaned forward and looked hard at him. Her eyes had a curious expression, half-reckless, half-despairing ; her hands clutched the arms of the chair with a grasp that hurt her delicate fingers.

"Well, John, have you nothing more to tell me?" she asked in a voice whose studied lightness overlaid a terrible suspense. "Nothing really interesting? Did you actually let Harry Hastings go off without telling you who *she* is? Come now, who *is* the woman?"

John Brown made no answer, but he looked at his wife, and she read in his eyes that *he knew*.

Thrice Engaged.

SHE was a very guileless young maiden, and her name was Mary Smith. She had been brought up on the bib-and-sampler system in a little country village, and at eighteen was as pretty and innocent a young thing as ever blushed at nothing—a sort of Bowdlerized edition of maidenhood. Tom Marston was the vicar's son, wild and scatter-brained. He had played his way through a public school, run riot at a crammer's, been plucked ignominiously for the army, and now, *because* he was wild and she was so very, very innocent, was busy falling in love with his pretty little neighbour, Mary Smith. He had it all his own way; there were no rivals to interfere with him; and Mary, after a very short siege, blushed deeply and capitulated at discretion. Their parents were not thought of at the time, but they came on the scene afterwards, and strictly forbade any idea of marriage till Tom was in a position to pay for the luxury of a wife. Tom's father wrote a letter and posted it without showing his son the address; but about two months later a letter arrived for Tom from India, offering him a berth on a tea estate in the Madras Presidency. He was to get Rs. 100 *per mensem*, with increased pay after the first year. "Let me see. That's equal to £10 a month, or £120 a year," exclaimed Tom, innocent of all the wild vagaries of exchange. "By Jove! What luck!" and off he went to Mary to tell her of his good fortune. So Tom, with a light heart, set sail for that old land of the Pagoda tree, where so many lives and hopes lie buried, and Mary went about sadly with tearful eyes. Tom was delighted with his life on the tea estate, but he soon discovered that he got very little change out of his Rs. 100 a month. He was popular, and young fellows from neighbouring estates had a habit of dropping in on Sundays and sampling Tom's beer and whiskey. The V. P. P. system had to give place to credit, and importunate letters began to arrive with threats of 12 *per cent.* interest. Marriage and Mary faded away to a very remote future; but Tom never despaired. He had long ago sown his scanty little crop of wild oats, and he worked hard and

steadily. His salary kept rising, but not sufficiently to raise him above the clogging slough of debt. At last, after seven years' hard labour, he had a wonderful piece of good luck. He drew the winning horse in a great Derby sweep, and won about a *lakh* of rupees. He paid off all his debts, wrote a voluminous English mail, the moral of which was that Mary should come out to him at once, and asked his friends to dinner. Then he bought an estate he knew of, ready fitted with tea trees, factory and bungalow, and resigned his appointment as superintendent. So it was settled that Mary should go out to him, and a chaperone was found for her in the person of a Mrs. Devigne, a languid lady, much addicted to incessant flirtations and a long deck-chair, who was returning to her husband in India. The voyage began in the ordinary way. The passengers gradually approached each other with little greetings and civilities, and before a week was over had formed their several little cliques and parties, and were familiar with every event in each other's life. The most assiduous attendant on Mrs. Devigne's deck-chair was a Mr. Theobald Sreck, a highly-mannered gentleman with a lisp, who darkly alluded to his aristocratic connections, and hinted with a captivating smile that Mrs. Devigne and Mary were the only people on board worth talking to. Mrs. Devigne was charmed with him, and Mary was fascinated by his eloquence. He lisped forth poetry by the hour, and thereby rendered a considerable portion of the deck free from all intruders, and he sang the most beautifully classical Italian songs to Mary's accompaniment. He walked many miles with her up and down the deck, and found out all about her—how she had been engaged to Tom for seven years, and was now going out to marry him; how she was an only child, and her father had a considerable fortune safely invested in a certain bank. And he became very attentive to her indeed.

One morning—they had touched at Malta the previous night—Mr. Theobald Sreck emerged on deck and almost ran into the arms of a fat little red-faced man, who had come on board the night before. He was smoking an early cheroot and his pyjamas fluttered in the breeze. Mr. Sreck couldn't smoke in the morning and objected to pyjamas on deck, so when the little stranger dared to offer him a cheroot and began to converse with him, he was very angry. He snubbed him severely and at last walked away from him; and the little man chuckled merrily and trotted

off to his tub. When Mary came on deck Mr. Sreck told her he had been insulted by a vulgar little "*cweature*" in pyjamas daring to "*intwude*" his society upon him, and was of opinion that "weally they ought not to allow that thort of perthon to twavel firht clath." But behold, when they went down to breakfast, room was found for the little man by the side of the captain, and he turned out to be a very big person indeed, with all sorts of letters after his name, and V.C. among them, at which discovery Mr. Theobald Sreck gasped, and felt very unwell.

They were through the Suez Canal, and out into the Red Sea, and as the weather grew hotter Mrs. Devigne grew more languid, and more deeply rooted than ever to her deck-chair. Mr. Sreck sat and fanned her, and told her about the lucrative business appointment in Madras he was going to take up. She considered that his talents and education would be thrown away in an office, and that one who could recite poetry so beautifully should be at least a clergyman. How sweetly, she thought, his graceful lisp would sound in a pulpit! Then he grew very confidential, and the fan fluttered feebly as he whispered that he was in love with Mary, and asked for Mrs. Devigne's advice on the subject. But Mrs. Devigne said it was far too hot to give any opinion about anything, but that her dear Mr. Sreck had her best wishes. Then she began to talk to Mary about the roughness and solitude of a planter's life, and to contrast it with the jovial life of an Indian town, with an occasional change to some gay station on the Hills. And Mary sighed, and thought of the seven long years she had waited for Tom, and wondered what he was like now, and could he be as nice as Mr. Sreck? She was sure he had not such a pleasant smile. They sat on deck in the still tropic nights as the ship was throbbing her way through the Indian Ocean, and watched the stars swaying across the taper masts as the ship rolled lazily from side to side, and Sreck was lisping tender little speeches. Tom little knew that, though every minute brought Mary nearer and nearer to him, her heart was drifting steadily away. He went down to Colombo to meet her, and soon after the ship had swung round the breakwater, and taken up her moorings, he went off to her in a snorting little steam-launch. He wandered over the ship looking for Mary, and at last found her sitting on the grating arrangement by the wheel at the stern. "Mary!" he said, with outstretched arms;

but there was no answering look of love in her eyes, and he sat down quietly by her side. Then she told him with many blushes her pitiful little tale. She had made a mistake in thinking she loved him, but he was the only young man she had ever seen, and till she had met her fate she did not know what love meant. Her "fate" was called Mr. Theobald Sreck, and he would have met Tom himself, only he was obliged to go on shore as soon as he possibly could on most important business, and had left the ship only ten minutes before Tom appeared. She did not mention that she had told Sreck that Tom had said in his last happy letter that he was going to Colombo to meet her. Then she cried, and said she was a wicked girl, and Tom felt very cold, and got away as soon as possible, and spent the rest of the day in walking about Colombo with a stick in search of Mr. Theobald Sreck. But he did not find him; the ship sailed away to Madras, and Tom went up-country to stay with some planting friends till the next steamer called at Colombo on her way to Madras.

Sreck had returned on board in decidedly bad spirits. He had read in the newspapers on shore an account of the smash of the bank in which Mary's father was a shareholder, and a very bad smash it promised to be. With an agreeable smile he handed the paper to Mrs. Devigne, and before long Mary knew that her father was ruined, and that her prospective fortune had vanished into thin air. There were no more poetical recitations from Mr. Sreck. He entirely deserted Mrs. Devigne's chair; and after one short speech to Mary abandoned her society. Mrs. Devigne was languidly angry, and in spite of Sreck's bland smiles and allusions to "board-thip flirtathions" she cut him dead, and Mary flushed up hotly and looked away whenever they met.

Tom landed in Madras a week afterwards with a sore heart, and had his baggage taken to the club. His letters were brought him, and among them, to his surprise, was one from Mary. It was very short, merely asking him to meet her at Mrs. Devigne's as soon as possible. He drove there at once, and Mary came, blushing into the room.

"Oh, Tom," she sobbed, "I don't know what to do. I am very, very wretched. That man—but, oh! I can't tell you—but Tom, would you forgive me, and—and take me back?"

Would he? His heart gave a great bound; he took her poor

little flushed face between his hands, and—well, there are some scenes in this life better imagined than described. At last Tom tore himself away, and went back to the club, where he met a friend clad in gorgeous new raiment. Tom asked him who his tailor was, and he mentioned the name.

"They have lately got out a new cutter from England," he said; "a wonderful fellow who calls himself Theobald Sreck."

"Who?" roared Tom.

"Funny name, isn't it?" said his friend; "but he's a rare good man at his work."

Tom retired for a quiet cheroot, and then drove away to his friend's tailor. He was received by Mr. Theobald Sreck with a particularly ingratiating smile. Tom saw that smile born, and watched it gradually widen as he advanced into the shop. He said he wanted some clothes for a wedding, and made his choice among the "sweet" or "quiet" patterns Mr. Sreck displayed before him. He had been quite cheerful hitherto, but as Mr. Sreck hovered round him with a tape measure, and lisped mysterious figures to an attendant clerk, his wrath gradually rose, and at the end he could hardly restrain himself.

"May I athk if I, have had the pleathure of meathuring you for your own wedding?" blandly inquired Mr. Sreck.

"Yes, you have," flashed Tom. "My name is Marston, and in these clothes I am going to marry Miss Mary Smith. And you—you are a low, mean blackguard."

Sreck pocketed the insult, and said nothing; but he became very white, and bowed Tom out with a vast, sickly smile.

* * * * *

"What swagger clothes," said Mrs. Marston, flicking some grains of Mrs. Devigne's rice from the collar. "Where did you get them, Tom?"

"They were built by Mr. Theobald Sreck," he replied. "My darling," he laughed, "I have had my revenge. He made my wedding garment!"

MONTAGUE KEY.

Denzil Morris ; Dramatist.

By CLIVE HOLLAND.

PART I.

"And she and Fate writ failure on the door of his heart."

IT was one of those fine days in early summer, when the hours seem longest and brightest. The scene was the river, upon the banks of which, hard by Hampton, the trees stood thick, scarce moving. The hot sun had long ago eaten up the faint breeze, which earlier in the day had stirred their leaves to rustling. The water itself shimmered and sparkled in the sunlight, and the sluggish eddies formed polished, golden bowls into which unwary waterflies, stray leaves and floating twigs were relentlessly drawn. Swallows skimmed along the surface with noisy twitterings, now rising, now falling, almost the only sign of life and movement.

At length, round a bend of the river below Hampton Palace, two boats are seen slowly advancing. In the first are two young men, rowing in "whites," a term which is simple and at the same time wonderfully inclusive, and in the stern a young lady sits, regarding their exertions with a feminine and somewhat commiserating languor, bred of a busy season. Her face is a beautiful one, and little likely indeed to be passed by unnoticed, for there was more than mere prettiness in it; scarcely intellectual, it was difficult to describe, for one hardly looks for cynicism in the face of a girl of twenty, who has still the fag end of her first season to come, and who ought to be as yet but lightly versed in the arts and wiles of "society" belles.

Lois Maitland was the daughter of Henry Maitland, the "Plumbago King," as the personal journalism of the day loved to call him, a cool, hard-headed man of business, in the habit of always getting twenty shillings—and oftener than not more—for his pound; and thus, perhaps, the look which occasionally stole across his daughter's face, so difficult for strangers to understand, and described by other less pretty and consequently less popular girls as "calculating," was inherited. Upon the summer's day of which we write there was good reason for this expression, for both

the young men, who somewhat lazily plied the oars, were engaged in admiring her, and in a way which a few months of *soirées*, dances and at homes had given her the necessary worldly wisdom to interpret aright.

And thus it happened that whilst her mother, several other girls, an elderly lady or two, and some three or four young men were enjoying the luxury of the steam-launch, which was now rapidly overtaking them, Lois was engaged in that delightful pastime (still held sacred to ladies) of balancing the merits of two eligible and rival lovers. They on their part were, she flattered herself, quite unaware of her mind's occupation, and each jealous of every look bestowed upon the other, they said little, but admired and thought much.

They were almost equally well favoured as to looks, neither strikingly handsome, but at the present time almost looking so in their boating attire.

Herbert Causton had money, and Lois, although she would have plenty, rather favoured a judicious acquisition of more, but he was not good-tempered, and scarcely so much of a gentleman as Denzil Morris, who was a more lively companion, and certainly much more admired by other girls, and this was a factor not to be overlooked. He was, moreover, undoubtedly clever, and would be quite a show husband and, as she had just thought to herself, "a credit to any girl."

Such musings as these occupied Lois so entirely that the stiff and restrained efforts of her two attendants to carry on a conversation, and "be pleasant to one another," passed quite unnoticed; and it was not until the launch drew level and set the skiff rocking in its wash that she was recalled to herself.

"Lois, you look deliciously lazy," her younger sister cried out as she passed.

"Hulloa, Morris, thinking of the new drama?" laughed one of the party on the steam-launch. "What's it to be? 'Paddling Some One Else's Canoe' or 'Two's Company——'?" The last of the sentence was lost in the distance amidst the ripple of feminine laughter evoked by the sally.

Lois was aroused but not in the least disturbed by the rather commonplace witticism, so she said:

"I think both of you must have been very lazy, or they would never have overtaken us thus soon. Don't you really think you

could pull a little harder? You look strong enough, I'm sure"—this last with a glance at Denzil Morris' bare and fairly muscular arms: a feminine half-frightened glance, as if strength was an almost incomprehensible quality which might hurt her.

"Very well, Miss Maitland. You steer and we'll see if we cannot overtake them before they land. Pull away, Causton. We've been, as Miss Maitland says, 'horribly lazy.'"

A few strong strokes and the boat gathered way and shot forward with a lip-lap of water at the bow, and Lois dreamily steering in the stern.

The sound of the rippling water, the drops as they fell from the blades of the sculls, and the swirl of the eddies as they swept astern was very soothing, and gradually she fell a-thinking again, and her thoughts were much the same as before. She was a clever girl, and knew perfectly well that both of the men who kept their eyes fixed so upon her face were in love with her, and that Denzil, as she called him so herself, was only waiting for an opportunity to speak.

This dark-haired girl with the oval face, shaded by a large sun-hat, in which a bunch of red poppies and yellow corn nodded, in her cool white dress, with two dark crimson roses coquettishly pinned at her breast, cared a little for him, just a little more than any other, and so she decided he should have his opportunity. It was a love of power that prompted her to this decision, for she did not care for him as he did for her.

A twinge of conscience may have touched her, but she dismissed the thought—she would be very kind to him, kinder than she had been to Johnny Sotheron, poor boy, and she smiled; for Johnny had been very much in earnest and she—well—she not at all. Kinder than she had been to young Estcourt; he was a very foolish young fellow, no doubt, every one said so, but she thought "he had done at least one sensible thing, and had showed good taste," by falling in love with her.

She loved the power her beauty gave; it was a joy to her if heart-breaking and sorrow-giving to others.

Once, it was after Johnny Sotheron's affair, she had lain awake long after she had gone to bed, and had been troubled, for she sought for her heart and could not find it. And for a few moments she lay with a chill upon her, and she almost cried out that she might have one, even if it made her unhappy; but the

cry died upon her lips and the void remained aching less and less, second by second.

A very similar feeling almost stole over her as she sat, on this hot summer's day, furtively watching Denzil Morris' earnest face. There was very little conversation carried on, for she did not wish to talk, and the two men had seemingly lost the power of speech, for the silence was only broken twice or thrice, and then only by a casual remark, until they came in sight of the launch, now close under the bank in search of a good landing-place.

All the party were soon on shore, whilst men from Tucker and Davidson's unpacked the luncheon.

None of the picnickers wandered very far, for although hunger suited scarce any of their stations—hunger being, at least in society, essentially vulgar—all were, nevertheless, intensely hungry. At luncheon the two waiters were voted rather a bore, and they became supplemented by several of the gentlemen. Most of the party had split up into little groups, and thus Lois was able to almost monopolize Denzil and Causton. She was very happy, for she loved the sunlight, she always looked well in it, and as yet she was fresh enough to stand its searching rays, besides, most people were happy and merry in it, and she liked happiness and merriment, and hated shade and sadness.

Soon after lunch a ramble in the woods was proposed by the more adventurous spirits of the party, and gradually all strayed off in twos and threes, or small knots of half-a-dozen or so, to make the most of a long afternoon and the shade.

Denzil and Causton attached themselves immediately to Lois, and then the three set out in search of flowers. They had gone but a little distance, however, before voices were heard summoning Causton's aid, and thus Lois and Denzil were left to wander on alone. They were soon in the woods, the last of a straggling line, that was quickly being broken more and more, as some or other of the ramblers struck off from the path amongst the trees.

Lois and Denzil had walked on for some distance when the former professed to be tired, saying:

"Isn't it fearfully hot, Mr. Morris? and here is a delightful tree, just the thing to rest against. If you don't mind, I think

I should like to stop a little while, and then we can go on and find the others. How they have the energy to walk at such a rate a day like this puzzles me."

Denzil looked round. They had wandered far enough into the cool shade of the wood to have lost sight of the path altogether, and were, therefore, almost perfectly secure from interruption.

"Very well, Miss Maitland," he replied; "nothing could be nicer, so let us sit down."

Lois seated herself upon the fallen trunk, and Denzil threw himself on the grass beside it. He was vainly endeavouring to find the best way of approaching fair Lois, who sat just above him tapping her daintily-shod feet with her parasol. She was very cool—a great contrast to himself—and chatted away gaily enough; so gaily that he began to misdoubt the signs by which he had fancied her heart to have become an open book to him.

Lois was thinking when he would speak, and what she could possibly say, for in the silence of the wood and after a glance at his face, she had suddenly been seized with a troublesome consciousness that she had gone too far with him—farther indeed than she had intended. This uncomfortable feeling increased, and at last she recognized that, like the boy in the fable, she had raised a spirit that she could not easily lay again.

She left off tapping her shoes suddenly, and nothing broke the silence for several moments. Even the leaves did not rustle, and the voices of the other members of the party had long ago died away in the distance; not a bird twittered, and the tall grass was almost still.

The silence began to terrify her, and she was about to seek refuge in motion, when Denzil rose and stood before her. He had forgotten to pick up his hat, which he had taken off when he threw himself down beside her, and the sun streaming through the boughs fell full upon him as he stood before her pale and calm with an intensity that in others would have heralded a passionate outburst.

Lois saw him; she knew why he was standing before her, and also what would fall from his lips in a moment, but a great fear kept her silent.

At length he spoke, and there was a tremulous vibration

in his voice, such as a harp or violin string gives when strained almost to breaking point.

"Lois. Lois, dearest!" burst from him. "Let me look into your eyes—look at me—you must know how I love you. And you love me, tell me so—oh! tell me that—say I am not mistaken. For it would be a terrible mistake for me."

He was silent for a moment, and looked down upon her, but she did not look up, but sat perfectly still, looking very pale, with bowed head.

"Lois, darling, look up; tell me that I am not mistaken," he cried.

But the only response was a half-stifled sob from the girl.

In a moment he knelt beside her, and strove to take one of her hands, but she pulled it from his grasp as if his touch burned her, saying:

"You will hate me, and oh! I deserve it. I am so sorry, so very sorry, but it is all a mistake."

Denzil was standing again now; every particle of colour had left his face, and there was a look of positive physical suffering in his eyes, such as a sudden and terrible sorrow will sometimes bring.

He stood with his face half-hidden in his hands, whilst Lois sobbed out her confession. She had but little to say and no excuses to make, and she was crying bitterly long before she had finished even that little.

When she prayed his forgiveness, and not till then, he uncovered his face. He was not one to pursue the matter further, even if she had not made it clear to him that it were useless to do so. Falling upon his knees he drew one of her hands away from her face, and in doing it the red roses pinned in her dress dropped, and their petals fell in a crimson shower over her white skirts and thence to the ground; she made no effort to draw her hand away, although she shivered, as she felt his hot kisses imprinted upon it, whilst he assured her again and again that he forgave her.

She intuitively knew that he was noble and true, and that she had played a part far below his in this life drama, but her old self soon reasserted itself, and knowing him to be good and true she believed in his forgiveness, and felt more happy.

Neither spoke. And so after a minute or two of silence, Denzil, who had risen, said, in a voice that was almost steady:

"Shall we return, Miss Maitland, or would you rather rest a little longer?"

Lois raised her face to him, and although she did not speak, the tear-stains appealed to him, and he understood her wish to be left alone a little while.

And so he wandered away blindly into the wood, every now and again stumbling and groping his path with outstretched arms as if he had lost all sense of sight.

It had been a terrible blow to him, a crushing disappointment, but, although a mist had gathered before his eyes and the sun had suddenly set, and memory and sense of almost everything seemed to fail him, no thought of blaming the girl he had just left entered his head.

He did not go very far, but lay down beside a fern-clad bank to think.

All the beauty of the trees, the sky, the light and shade, which had charmed him an hour before in a way they had never done before, now seemed blotted out; he was dazed by the sudden fall of his castles in the air and overwhelming destruction of his hopes.

He did try to think at first, but soon gave up doing so, and 'twas well, for with rest came a certain amount of composure.

Lois sat still after he had left her. She was not crying now, but she felt utterly miserable, and more unhappy than she had ever been before.

For the first time since she had left girlhood behind her she had experienced an uncomfortable feeling that she was heartless, and had done another a cruel wrong. But her disposition was too changeable, too volatile, for such a fit of repentance to last long, and when Denzil Morris returned she had recovered her composure sufficiently to be cruelly kind to him.

Neither Lois nor Denzil spoke until they rejoined some of the party, who happened to be returning for tea; fortunately too gay and happy to notice that anything unusual had occurred. Denzil had by now quite recovered control of himself, and Lois felt not a little relieved when she furtively glanced at him to find this was the case. After a commonplace remark or two he resigned his place to Causton, who came up, and betook himself to the company of the younger members of the party.

When the time came for the return, Lois chose to stay on board the launch.

In the fun and merriment of the return journey, Lois and Denzil found a refuge from inquisitive eyes, and when they landed at Kingston, some to return to Waterloo by train, they had recovered sufficiently to parry the banter and inquiries as to where their walk had led them, with success.

PART II.

FAME.

"Refuge of hope, the harbinger of truth,
Handmaid of heaven, virtue's skilful guide,
The life of life, the ages' springing youth,
Triumph of joy, eternity's fair bride.

* * * * *

The star by which men to the stars do climb."

—*Drayton.*

It was some weeks later ere Lois and Denzil again met, and she had as yet scarcely recovered from the knowledge which had suddenly come to her on that hot summer's afternoon; the strange feeling that she was a woman now, and that the world would hold her more responsible for the harm and sorrow her thoughtlessness might cause.

Denzil noticed that a change had come over her, and that she avoided him and his society as much as possible. He was hurt, but not surprised, as he felt certain that for her to conceal what had occurred from eyes always ready to note, was a more difficult task than for him.

He saw very little of her, and although he dined once or twice at Cadogan Place, it always happened that he was deputed to "take in" some guest and not her.

Gradually he went out less and less often, and invitations were declined in larger numbers, and as he was popular and sought after, people began to wonder what had become of him.

If he were questioned or quizzed at the "Dramatic," he said very little beyond a hint of business. Once, when fairly brought to bay on the subject of his ever-increasing social delinquencies by his greatest friend, who had been to college with him, and had for some time shared his rooms, he did offer an explanation.

"The reason I don't go out much, Hazlett, is simply I haven't

the time. I am working night and day at that new piece of mine. It's taking all my thought and energies. I have no time for social duties."

"It is taking more than all your energies, Denzil. You're looking wretchedly ill, and if you don't take care you will have a breakdown. I hear that you don't even go to the Maitlands' now; Mrs. Maitland was only yesterday referring to it."

"It's no use your talking, Hazlett; when I've finished the play, I shall take a long rest: go abroad, very likely."

"Mind, Denzil, I've warned you, and you'll be a fool if you don't take my advice; that's all I've got to say."

"Thanks, old boy, but you were always a bit of a croaker. Don't you remember the fellows used to dub you 'nurse'?"

"By the way, have you seen Causton lately, Hazlett?"

"No, not since a month or two ago. I believe he is stopping at a place in the north. I thought there was something up between him and Lois Maitland, but I suppose I must have been mistaken."

"Why, Denzil, what in the world's the matter?"

Denzil Morris had sunk into a chair, and with his face very white, was pressing his hand to his forehead, as if to clear away a gathering mist.

"Oh, nothing. Only I'm rather seedy this morning. I hardly got any rest last night."

"Just what I told you! You're overworked. I shall come and look after you a bit, whether you like it or not. Come! You had better go home."

* * * *

Denzil Morris had his rooms in Victoria Street, Westminster, only a few minutes' drive from the "Dramatic."

Hazlett threw himself into a chair, and contemplated the confusion with the air of bailiff in charge. After a moment or two's silence, between the puffs of his cigar, he began a running comment, which Denzil listened to with closed eyes, as he reclined in a deck chair.

"Well! Of all the untidy beggars I ever came across, Denzil, you beat all. What's this?" kicking over a pile of newspapers which lay within reach, beside a writing-table. "How in the name of goodness do you manage to find things? If I were to let my papers and letters get into such a muddling confusion,

I should never have another brief. Who's that over there?" pointing to a photo in a silver frame which stood on the mantel-piece. "Lois Maitland, by Jingo! So there's something in it after all, is there?"

Denzil made no reply, but still lay with closed eyes, and at length Hazlett seemed to see rest was what he wanted and not rousing. So he puffed away in silence, turning over the pages of a loosely-bound volume of press cuttings. At length Denzil fell asleep, and then he, seeing this, stole quietly away, meaning to look in again later on.

It was quite dark when the sleeper awoke, startled into consciousness by the heavy boom of Big Ben from the clock tower hard by. The gas was lighted in the streets, and a constant stream of carriages and people threw strange shadows on road and pavements. He generally dined at one of his clubs, but tonight he was too tired, and, moreover, felt he had wasted enough of the evening already; so he rang the bell, determining to make the best of what he could get in the house.

He gave his orders and then, although feeling very disinclined for work, he sat down with the intention of finishing the few remaining lines of his play before going to bed.

The table was covered with books of reference, cuttings (not yet collated) from papers, the full reports of a recent sensational trial, note-books and sketch-books, containing drawings of stage costumes, seemingly without end. Papers, letters, magazines and theatrical notices strewed the floor, which, to a strange eye, would present an appearance of inextricable confusion.

He worked on, slowly covering the pages, absorbed in his task, and fast losing in it the appetite for the dinner which had been brought and was now rapidly cooling upon a table near the fire.

At length, however, he rose and took a mouthful or two of food, and then, returning to his desk, worked on as before. Hour after hour he wrote, until the blackness of midnight fell over the city, till the chill which precedes the dawn caused him to shiver. And then the last page was covered, the last word written, and the "Broken Vow," by which, he felt, he would stand or fall, was finished.

He did not rise, but leant forward with his arms upon the table and his head resting upon them.

Next morning, the porter who called him found him thus, and muttered to himself: "This sort o' thing can't go on for ever, and Mr. Morris, he's a over-working himself," but, as this was not the first time he had found him of a morning sleeping at his desk lately, he made no remark to the sleeper.

* * * * *

A few months later and the "Broken Vow" was placarded all over London, for Denzil Morris' play, after being speedily returned by two managers, had found a home at the Athenic, and was now soon to be produced.

It was being anticipated with an unusual amount of interest, for the manager of the Athenic let it be widely known that he thought it a "good thing," and a play with money in it.

At last the night came. The house was crowded. In one of the boxes sat Lois Maitland, with her mother and father. She was very excited, more so than she could account for; and she hung on every movement and word of the players with an intensity that soon made her lose consciousness of aught else. In one of the side boxes, with the crimson curtains partly drawn, sat the author and his friend, Charles Hazlett—the one almost consumed by anxiety; the other, who recognized that the play was already a great success, endeavouring to calm and cheer his excitable companion.

The last scene was half-way through when the door opened and the manager entered. He was very much excited, but he said little, only:

"Morris, my dear fellow, we have scored a big success. The 'Broken Vow' will be more even than *the* play of the season. Come! They will be calling for you in a few minutes."

"I can't face them, Bolton; it's no use. I am quite knocked up. I hardly know where I am. I really can't."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow!" said the manager. "Here, Hazlett, you help me. He *must* come."

Between the two of them they managed to half drag, half lead him to the wings.

The curtain fell on the last scene, and amidst the enthusiastic applause Lois heard the call of, "Author." Although she was very pale now, and something she could not stay to name or identify kept throbbing in her heart, she leant forward in the box.

He was famous! He whom she had scorned—whose love she had treated as an idle thought, pleasant and flattering to her self-esteem, no doubt, but scarce worthy of consideration. And now the thoughts crowded thick and hot into her brain—that she might have shared his triumph, his joys, his sorrows, his fame.

She was very human, after all, and her heart was neither the icy lump she had fancied, nor the unbreakable thing her women friends had often covertly hinted.

The applause and calls for the well-known name seemed to deafen her. She trembled, and then, as the familiar figure came hesitatingly before the curtain, a mist clouded her sight.

But one glance was sufficient to make her aware that he was very ill. And after this she sat very still with the tears—girlish tears—of remorse and sympathy welling up into her eyes. She sat with her gaze fixed upon him and with a chill feeling at her heart.

He had been there but a moment or two before she saw him stumble and fall forward, and then everything became misty to her and indistinct; the floor seemed to be revolving beneath her feet; there was a confused murmur in her ears, and then the faces around her faded from her sight.

* * * *

PART III.

SUCCESS AND ITS EPILOGUE.

"The day drags through, though storms keep out the sun;
And thus the heart will break, yet brokenly live on."

—Byron.

IT was with a dull sense of pain and confusion of mind that Lois awoke next morning, for she had scarcely regained consciousness even when in her own room, and it was still some time before she could recall anything that had occurred the night before.

At length, however, the scene in the theatre came back to her, and with it an intense longing to know how it fared with Denzil Morris, and the colour stole again into her face as she thought of him.

When she went downstairs she eagerly scanned the papers for news, and the flush deepened as she read the following notice in the *Daily Sun*:

"THE BROKEN VOW' AT THE ATHENIC THEATRE.

"It will be a severe shock to most playgoers, and indeed to those of the public generally who value what is true and good in art and human nature, to learn that Mr. Denzil Morris, the talented and popular young dramatist, the author of what will probably be one of the greatest dramatic successes of the present decade, is laid low by paralysis. It appears, from the scanty information which we have been able to obtain, that Mr. Morris has latterly been terribly over-worked, and rest has, for a long time past, been the imperative command of his medical man. No one, however, expected the end of his strength was so near. If the 'Broken Vow,' which last night marked the commencement of a new epoch in the British Drama of the highest type, warranted unfavourable criticism, the sad event which marked its production would silence all captious analysis. But, beyond a few inevitable 'slips,' which are rarely, if ever, absent from a first night, the 'Broken Vow' is a noble piece of dramatic construction. Human passion and pathos play their parts with a vividness and reality that took the house and the hearts of the large audience simply by storm. The nobility of Thomas Evan-son, and the winning sweetness of Madge Cashel, would alone place the piece far in the front rank; but there are other characters—Denis Crawshaw, Alan Gordon and Millicent Leigh, notably—of almost equal merit and interest. The wild scene of Millicent's death, the interview between Madge Cashel and Thomas Evan-son, and the scene at the burning of Blair Castle, caused many eyes to grow suspiciously dim around us, and a perfect hush to fall upon the large assembly.

"At the fall of the curtain there was a dead silence of perhaps a minute, so intense had been the strain; and then, amidst a confused murmur of voices, we could catch the words 'Denzil Morris' and 'Author.' In an instant or two the murmur had become an enthusiastic roar, people standing up in their places, so great was their excitement.

"At last Mr. Morris, accompanied by Mr. Bolton, appeared before the curtain, and we immediately noticed that he was looking miserably ill, pale and careworn. The audience's enthusiasm knew no bounds, and round after round of applause greeted him when, suddenly, as he was in the act of again bowing his acknowledgments, his face took a deathly pallor and

he stumbled forward. Mr. Bolton, however, caught him in his arms, and, amidst a scene of wild but almost instantly suppressed excitement, he was borne behind the curtain.

"The sudden hush which fell upon the audience was startling in its intensity, and for a time no one sought to move. It was generally thought that Mr. Morris' indisposition would prove to be nothing more serious than a fainting fit, and it was not until Mr. Bolton's reappearance that the truth became known. The audience, in accordance with his request, slowly dispersed without further demonstration.

"Upon inquiry just before going to press we regret to learn Mr. Morris still remains unconscious. A further report of the 'Broken Vow,' with the cast, appears elsewhere."

When Lois had finished reading the foregoing, she sat down covering her face with her hand. She did not cry, for no tears would come, but she remained perfectly still with an aching heart, waiting for the hour (which seemed a lifetime) when her mother, who had driven to Victoria Street, would return with the latest news.

It was late when Mrs. Maitland returned, and Lois met her in the hall.

"Lois, dear, you will be glad to hear Mr. Morris is a little better, but not yet out of danger. Come with me into my room; I wish to speak to you."

When they were alone, Mrs. Maitland said:

"Lois, you must tell me everything. I think I guessed your secret last night."

"I will tell you all—everything, mother. Oh! how he must have despised and hated me, and I hate and despise myself a thousand times."

"No, Lois; he does not hate you," said Mrs. Maitland; "his mother and sister are already there, Mr. Hazlett telegraphed for them, and she told me she suspected something, although he is speechless, and so white and still."

Lois was crying bitterly by now, and it was a long time before her mother could calm her. But both mother and daughter had always understood one another, and the talk did Lois more good than anything else could have done.

* * * * *

Three days later the Maitlands' carriage drew up at Denzil

Morris' chambers in Victoria Street, and Lois and her mother alighted. They were shown into his room, now no longer littered with books and papers, for a sister had laid ruthless, if tidy, hands upon them, and neatness for once prevailed. Lois was very shy, and almost felt her courage fail her when Mrs. Morris, looking very ill and troubled, entered.

"My dear, the doctor says you may see him, only for a moment or two, though. He has been looking for you, I am sure of it, although he cannot speak your name."

The Lois who followed Denzil's mother into the darkened room was very different from the girl of a few short months ago. Nervousness had replaced self-possession, and with the awakening of her heart, some of the dignity of a truer, purer womanhood had crept over her; she was pale, too, and the lines beneath her eyes spoke more eloquently to Mrs. Morris' heart than any words could have done.

All Lois saw was Denzil's face as he lay quite still with closed eyes in the half-gloom, and she had knelt down at the bedside with her head bowed over the thin hand that lay powerless on the coverlet, before he opened them.

At first he looked at her without recognition, and then his eyes seemed to know her, and a flush of faint colour suffused his cheeks. There was a struggle for speech, and when the word "Lois" broke from his lips, she felt the useless hand grasp hers with renewed power.

"Denzil, can you ever forgive me?" the words were spoken very pleadingly and low.

There was no need for her to hear the answer, though it came, faint, but with no hesitation, "Yes." And then she gazed upon his pale face, on which there rested the calm of forgiveness and infinite love.

"The House that Jack Built."

By DARLEY DALE,

Author of "FAIR KATHERINE," "THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH," etc.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FLOWING TIDE COMES IN.

"AMY, dear, I must drive in to St. Helier's to-day. The girls have nothing to wear. I want to choose their new dresses. Will you come with me?" said Miss Keppel, one morning in May, to her niece.

"No, thank you, auntie. Surely Aunt Dorcas and Aunt Lydia can choose their own dresses; they are old enough," said Mrs. Lockwood.

"My dear child, I never let them do that. Lydia is apt to dress too girlishly if left to herself, and there is no saying what solecism Dorcas would not commit if I did not look after her. I must go. Do you mind being left alone?"

"Not in the least. I shall sketch, very likely," said Amy.

Mrs. Lockwood and Miss Keppel were staying at Plemont, a high point on the north-west corner of the island. Amy was not very well, and the doctor had recommended the bracing air of Plemont for her and the baby for a week or two. So she was living with Miss Keppel, the nurse and the baby at the hotel there for a fortnight. It was now early May, and as the tourist season had not yet begun they had the hotel to themselves, and the caves for which Plemont is celebrated also, generally speaking, though already picnic parties had begun.

Jack's regiment had been gone nearly six months; he had been depressed and not very well all the winter and spring, and though he had been out to every party with his wife, the gulf between them was wider than ever.

Jack had been outwardly a pattern husband, most attentive and kind, but really as cold as ice, and Amy felt her refusal to go to India had lost her what affection Jack had ever had for her.

He was a disappointed man, and was becoming a morose one also. He hated Jersey and the idle life and its constant round of gaiety, the sameness of which palled on him.

He longed for a wider sphere in which to live and move and have his being ; the island seemed to grow smaller daily, and he felt more and more "cabined, cribbed, confined" in it.

He missed his own regiment and brother officers, and if it had not been for Major Graham, who had also exchanged, wishing for his children's sake to remain in Jersey, he would have had no real friend to confide in.

The colonel of the new regiment was a very disagreeable man, and it required all Jack's tact and talent to keep in with him. So what with his blighted career, his present fretting duties, his impatience of the mill of gaiety he was obliged to tread, there was perhaps some excuse for his bad temper.

Amy, too, had had her troubles. Her debts were increasing, and with them her fear lest her husband should hear of them ; but as the regiment was to stay two years, the tradespeople were content not to press for payment, and Amy's principal creditor, her dressmaker, was quieted by a sop of ten pounds every quarter.

Mrs. Lockwood was still the rage, she had several admirers in the new regiment, but on her too society and parties began to pall somewhat, and she was now possessed by an intense longing to win the love of one man, one who of all her admirers was the least inclined to give it her, and that man was her husband.

It would not be true to say she was in love with him, she was a long way off that ; it was doubtful if she ever could or would be in love with any one but herself ; but at any rate she respected and admired him, and her love of conquest made her covet his love.

She could not bear the thought that he would have been a happier man had he married Joy, yet she knew it was the truth ; the deep-set melancholy of his face annoyed more than it pained her, it was a reproach to her ; his coldness piqued her vanity if her nature was not deep enough to be actually wounded by it ; his love for his tiny daughter, which was becoming the passion of his life, roused her jealousy, and she almost hated the tiny baby in whose presence her husband's stern features would relax, and his sad eyes light up with a smile she had never awakened in them.

Little Gladys already knew her father's step and voice, and would try to jump out of her foster-mother's arms at the sound of them, and it was more to remove the child from her father than for its own sake that Amy consented to take it to Plemont with her. But she saw nothing of it except for one hour during the day, the nurse's dinner hour, when she took care of it.

"What time is it high water to-day?" asked Mrs. Lockwood of the hotel-keeper, as she set off on a sketching expedition, after Miss Keppel had driven off, taking the nurse and baby with her.

"At three o'clock, madam."

"Then I shall be safe in the caves till half-past twelve. We will lunch at two to-day," said Amy, as she started for the beach, meaning to make a sketch of the celebrated Needle Rock cave.

That same May morning Jack Lockwood was inspired with the idea of riding out to see his wife; Major Graham rather wished to send his children out to Plemont for a week, and was coming out that afternoon to see if Amy, who was not fond of children, would have any objection; so Jack came first as a pioneer.

On reaching the hotel Mr. Lockwood found his wife was gone to the beach, so he followed her, sauntering slowly down the winding path which leads over the gorse-covered cliffs to the sands and caves.

The sun shone brilliantly; the cloudless sky was magnificently blue, the sea bluer than the sky, with purple shadows and green lights on it; it was past the half-tide, and the sea was rolling in in crested waves, whose white foam sparkled like frost diamonds in the sunlight.

Far away the blue sea melted in a soft white haze into the blue sky; but closer inland the colours were more brilliant, and as Jack looked up from the green cliffs, studded with the great white stars of the marguerites and the deep golden blossoms of the gorse, to the emerald sea breaking in dazzling white foam on the yellow sands and playing round the red granite rocks which line the bay, he was glad his wife was enjoying all this beauty.

He sauntered slowly down the winding path and then clambered over the rocks till he stood in the bay with the Needle Rock cave on his left.

"Beauty is cheap here; it is one of the few advantages the place possesses," he thought, as he wandered into the cave and

looked at the pointed granite pillar called the Needle Rock, which stands at its entrance, and admired the red walls of the cave, with the tufts of brilliant green fronds of the asplenium marinum fern growing above high-water mark in the roof.

He was in no hurry, so he lighted a cigar, and sitting down on a rock smoked it, watching the beautiful sea the while, as the waves danced among the rocks, throwing their arms round some, gently touching those nearer land with their spray, laughing merrily, and alas ! cruelly also, all the while.

Presently he rose, and clambering over the rocks which lie at the entrance of the cave, he found to his surprise, but not at all to his alarm, that the sea had advanced so that he could not return by the way he came unless he was prepared to get wet through, for it was possible yet to get back at the cost of a wetting.

But he had on a new suit of clothes and did not wish to spoil them unnecessarily, so glancing across the bay he decided to make for the opposite side of it and find some place to clamber up over the cliffs. The cliffs looked to be sheer precipice at this distance, but as he knew the distance was very deceptive, they were probably less steep than they looked ; so he set off across the sands.

"I must have missed Amy, I don't see any sign of her," he thought as he crossed the little bay, on the opposite side of which were some other caves.

"I have never been inside those caves ; I wonder what they are like," thought Jack, turning into them when he reached them.

But at the entrance of the first cave he paused, for before him, seated on a camp stool, her hat on the sand by her feet, a little sketching block on her knees, her head pillowed against the granite rock, fair and beautiful as the day, sat his wife fast asleep.

His step woke her, and opening her eyes with a start, Amy exclaimed :

"Why, Jack, what brings you here?"

"I came over to luncheon, but it is quite a chance I found you here, Amy ; I could not get back by the steps, so I——"

"What !" interrupted Amy, starting up and looking across the bay at the sea, which was now washing over the rocks Jack had clambered down to reach the bay.

"My God, we are cut off ! we can't get back this way !" she exclaimed.

"Nonsense; surely we can climb up over these cliffs," said Jack, beginning to be alarmed.

"We can't, it is sheer precipice, and the sea washes completely up to it. That way you came is the only way down. What is the time?" said Amy, turning pale with fear.

"A little past one," said Jack. "When is it high water?" he added.

"At three. It is never safe after the half-tide. What a fool I was to go to sleep! Oh! what shall we do—what shall we do? Look, Jack, the sands will soon be covered. Unless some one rescues us we are lost!" exclaimed Amy.

And she looked at the cruel waves dancing towards her with eyes wide with terror, for she knew that dance was the dance of death; and yet the sun shone gloriously, the blue sky was cloudless, the waves laughed wildly and tossed their foaming crests in an ecstasy of joy, as if mocking the young husband and his beautiful wife.

"We can't be lost, Amy. Stay here while I go and see if there is not some place we can climb up," said Jack, who, though he had no particular love of life, had no wish to die in this way.

"No, no! don't leave me! Let me come too. I can't die alone—I won't be left!" said Amy, clutching hold of Jack's arm.

"I won't leave you, Amy; but there is no fear of death. At the worst we can take refuge in the cave," said Jack gravely but tenderly, for his wife's terror touched him.

"The cave is dark and horrible—we should be suffocated. I would rather be drowned out here in the sunshine. They say drowning is painless," said Amy, pulling Jack away from the cave.

"We won't go there unless we are obliged," said Jack, who was eagerly scanning the cliffs, which were still accessible, to see if it were possible to scale them.

"There is nothing for it but the cave, Amy. We must take refuge there when the sea drives us into it. I will go and explore it and see if it seems safe. Sit down on this rock till I come out," said Jack, when he had satisfied himself this was the only thing to be done.

The cave was a fairly large one. It receded for about fifteen feet and then turned abruptly to the right, where it ended in a funnel-shaped passage, tapering towards the extreme end. By

the light of a fusee, Jack saw that at the far end there was a narrow ledge of rock about three feet from the ground, and by standing on this ledge and propping himself up by his arms against the opposite wall, he thought it would be possible to keep dry ; for, on examining the walls carefully, he did not think the sea came up to the end of the cave.

While he was thus engaged, Amy was watching the relentless sea, now coming close to the rock on which she was sitting, and calculating that in another half-hour they would be driven inside the cave.

How horrible it would be !

"It is all right, Amy ; we can take shelter there. I don't think the tide reaches the far end, and I don't think we shall have very long to spend there. Let me see, it is a quarter to two ; high water at three—two hours at the outside for us in the cave, and then we shall have another two hours before we can get back from the beach. We shall be ready for dinner by six this evening instead of eight," said Jack, anxious to cheer his wife.

Amy did not reply for a moment, but, turning her pale face, gazed on the waves, which now threatened every moment to wash round her feet.

It was so bright and beautiful there in the sunlight, it was scarcely possible to believe it would be death to remain there, that in less than half-an-hour the sea would be washing into the cave ; and yet she knew it was true. The cave was their only hope, and the cave was a horrible alternative.

As she realized that in a few minutes they would be driven by the relentless waves into the shelter of the cave, a sense of impotent rage took possession of her. She was angry with herself, with Jack, with the sea, with the people who did not come to rescue them, with everything, with everybody, and she burst into a fit of childish tears, crying between her sobs :

"Why did I come to this dreadful place ? Why did you not wake me sooner ? Why does not some one come and save us ? It is a shame, a cruel, cruel shame that I should die in this way !"

"You will not die, Amy dear ; I will save you if it is possible," said Jack kindly, as a bigger wave than the previous ones washed round the rock Amy was sitting on, the spray falling on her face.

Amy shrieked, and, jumping off the rock, clung to her husband, who put his arm round her and led her towards the cave.

"Don't be frightened, dear ; we shall be safe enough here. Come inside and let us sit down and time it. There is just an hour before the tide turns."

Amy, sobbing pitifully, let him do as he pleased with her. He was very gentle and tender ; he found as comfortable a place as the cave offered for her, and, putting his arm round her, pillowed her head on his shoulder and did his best to reassure her fears.

There they sat for half-an-hour, the sea washing into the cave now, every wave threatening to drive them round into the dark part of the cave ; and as Amy felt her husband's arms round her, her conscience smote her. Should she make a clean breast of it and tell him of her debts ?

Would she ever have a more favourable opportunity than now, with death staring them in the face ?

Would he ever be so disposed to forgive her ? Had she the courage to tell him ?

She would have to speak loud, for the sea was making such a noise ; but otherwise it would not be so difficult. For with death so close at hand surely Jack would look upon debt as a very minor evil ; while it would be easier to die with a light conscience, if die she must.

But no, she could not tell him ; and yet it would be better for her and better for him that they should both perish than that they should live and he remain in ignorance of it.

While she hesitated, the splash of a breaking wave warned them to move round into the dark part of the cave.

"Oh ! let us go out and die in the sunshine. We shall be suffocated here," said Amy.

This was precisely what Jack feared might happen, but he made light of it.

"Not we. It is half-past two now ; the tide won't come up much higher," he answered.

The noise of the sea was so loud that they had to shout to each other, and it was quite dark in this part of the cave. It was enough to terrify a strong man—no wonder Amy was almost dead with fear. She clung to Jack in an agony of terror, as wave after wave broke in the mouth of the cave and the sea washed up the funnel, each wave coming nearer and nearer to

the hapless pair, who stood leaning against the wall at the furthest end.

The noise of the breaking waves was deafening, it echoed and re-echoed in the cave and was louder than any thunder ; the darkness, too, was very terrible.

Presently Jack struck a light and looked at his watch.

It was a quarter to three.

"Courage, Amy, only a quarter of an hour more," he shouted into his trembling wife's ear.

As he spoke the sea washed round their feet and he feared that a stronger wave would sweep them away into the outer cave, so he lifted Amy on to the narrow ledge of rock and, climbing up himself, held her with his left arm, while with his right hand he supported himself against the opposite wall, for the cave was so narrow here that he was able easily to do so.

Amy was now so exhausted that unless he had held her up firmly with his left arm she would have fallen, and he dreaded every moment he should feel her arms, which were round his neck, relax, and find her unconscious and a dead weight in his arms.

"I am counting the minutes, Amy ; we have only seven more before the tide turns," he shouted, but he could not be certain his calculation was correct.

Every moment Amy seemed to get heavier, and his arms ached so, he feared he would not have the strength to hold her up much longer ; but each time he shouted some word of encouragement he felt her grasp of him tighten.

"Three more minutes," he shouted.

Suddenly a wave struck the side of his face and the force of it caused him to waver on his perch.

Was it the tidal wave or would the next wave be higher and stronger ?

If it were he could not withstand it.

He stooped and kissed his wife, and while he whispered, "Courage," his heart beat high, for he felt another wave like the last would wash them into eternity.

In spite of the danger, nay because of it, he was enjoying the adventure ; he felt he was fighting against tremendous odds, he was heavily handicapped by Amy, and he enjoyed the battle ; it was life to which the daily routine of his duties was mere existence.

Death must come some day, if it came now he would meet it like a man, but he would first fight his hardest for life, for life at its bitterest is sweeter than death.

Fear death? not he; he feared nothing in this world, and as for the next, well, he knew little enough about it, and thought less; he would do his duty here and trust all would come right hereafter.

Fighting was his calling; no matter in what form the enemy came, an advancing army or the advancing tide, he was ready to meet it and fight for his life.

"One fight more, the last and the best." As that last insolent wave struck his face his brain reeled with anger; it was as though the arch-fiend had mockingly dealt him a blow, and he felt as men say they have felt when face to face with the foe, not like men, but like animals lusting for blood, mad with anger. Had his enemy been human he would have fought like a tiger; as it was he longed to wrestle breast to breast with these cruel waves, to jump into the sea and fight there for his life.

If it had not been for Amy he would have done so in the first instance; nay, if the next wave were as insolent as the last, he would do so now with her in his arms; die they must in that case, but he would die fighting; he was nothing if not a soldier.

And Amy, of what was she thinking as she stood in her husband's arms, she and he, breast to breast and heart to heart, though their souls were so far asunder? Not of death, but of love.

Yes, of love; for in that cave with hell yawning beneath her she had found heaven; for to her henceforth Jack's arms would be heaven, since the spray that roused his anger woke her sleeping soul, and she found that she loved him.

He did not love her, she knew; she had deceived him so cruelly perhaps he never would love her; but he was dying for her; he could have saved himself had he left her; that too she knew; but he had chosen to stay with her, little as she deserved it. How brave he was, this husband of hers whom she so tardily learnt to love, whom, perhaps, she would never have loved but for this incident, which showed her how brave and noble he was. She knew no one else who would have acted like this after the way she had treated him.

Her eyes had hitherto been blinded, but now, when she saw how superior he was to all her admirers, she loved him, urged by that law which decrees:

"We needs must love the highest when we see it, not Lancelot, nor another."

He was her King Arthur ; was it too late that she loved him ?

She had not sinned like Guinevere ; was there not a place of repentance for her ?

She had ever been true to him in deed if false in word, when she stole him from Joy, but now she was his : body, soul and spirit if he would have her ; but, alas, the darkness of that cave was as light compared with the black cloud that divided their souls.

As he bent over her and whispered, "Courage," her lips met his, and then her head fell back on his shoulder, and she fainted, not with fear of death as he imagined, but with exhaustion born of emotion, not of physical fatigue.

CHAPTER XXI.

AMY LOSES AN OPPORTUNITY.

"COURAGE," was the last word Jack Lockwood spoke, as he stood with aching arms holding Amy up and supporting himself till the next wave should come and wash them off their perch, or warn him to jump in and die fighting amid the deafening roar of the sea, louder than any thunder as it was ; in utter darkness, with every muscle strained, every nerve quivering, he waited, expecting every instant to feel another wave stronger than the last break over them.

He counted fifty, and it did not come. The waves were breaking and tossing themselves far up the funnel of the cave, but he felt no more spray on his face.

He counted one hundred, and he thought he had now only a few more seconds to wait. The sea roared loudly as ever. Amy's arms relaxed their hold on his neck as she fainted ; and her head sank on to his breast ; but he managed still to hold her up. It could only be for a few more seconds ; he was glad she was unconscious, she would be spared the pain of death.

He counted one hundred and fifty, and still no wave dared to touch a hair of his head again.

He counted two hundred, and a wild hope rose in his breast that the danger was past. This hope gave him fresh strength, and he raised his unconscious wife a trifle higher in his arms.

He counted three hundred, and no wave reached him, and his hope grew stronger and stronger.

Surely, surely the tide had turned ; the moaning sea was moaning because deprived of its prey. His head felt numbed by the awful noise ; the darkness weighed as heavily on his mind as his unconscious burden on his arms, but every second his hope grew stronger and stronger, till when he reached five hundred, the hope amounted to certainty.

The tide had turned.

Joy, higher than the rising tide, wilder than the surging waves, deeper than the fathomless sea, rose in his breast ; for the capacity for suffering and for enjoyment of one human soul is infinite : the ocean has its bounds, but there is no limit to joy such as Jack Lockwood now felt, the joy of life. Exhausted as he was, he felt new strength in his tired limbs ; a few more minutes and he could jump off his perch and stand on the floor of the cave ; the sea still washed up there, but he was so wet it would not matter. He did not mind the deafening noise now ; it seemed to him the sea was rejoicing at his escape ; if only he could make Amy hear the good news, but she was still unconscious.

A minute or two later he ventured to step off the ledge on to the sand, from which the sea was now receding, though the foam after each wave broke, still washed up almost to the end of the cave. He had Amy in his arms, but regardless of the water, the first thing he did was to place her flat on her back, knowing the recumbent position would bring her round almost immediately ; then he bent over her and she gave a little shiver ; he whispered loudly in her ear :

"We are saved, my darling."

The epithet was strange as it was sweet to Amy, coming from his lips ; but in the excitement of the moment it was no exaggerated expression. She was dear to him just then ; the peril they had shared drew them together ; he almost loved her.

"Has the tide turned ?" said Amy.

"Yes ; in another ten minutes we can get into the other cave ; I could get there now if I waded," said Jack.

He did not add that at any time he could have saved himself by swimming had he been alone ; but Amy had from the first suspected as much ; she knew he had risked his own life to save her, preferring to die with her rather than live without her. At the same time she knew it was his sense of chivalry and duty which made him do this ; it was not love ; it was *noblesse oblige*.

"Lift me up, my feet are wet and cold," said Amy; and Jack raised her and placed her in a sitting position with her back resting against the wall of the cave; her skirts were wet, and he wrung the water out of them as well as he could in the darkness, which was lessening as the sea went down, and left a wider opening at the mouth of the outer cave for the light to enter by.

"There, now I can get into the other cave, I believe; shall I go and try?" said Jack, who was longing to see daylight again.

"Yes, but be quick back," said Amy.

So Jack splashed through the sea to the outer cave, where he found the water still knee deep, but it was going down very rapidly; from here he could look across the sunlit sea, and gaze at the blue patch of heaven visible at the mouth of the cave, and never had sea or sky seemed so beautiful as they did to him then. He shouted with delight and threw up his arms at the welcome sight, and then he went back to his wife.

"It is glorious to see the light again; will you come, Amy? I will carry you if you will," he said joyfully, and his joy was infectious. Amy caught it, and as she longed to get out of the darkness, he picked her up and carried her to the entrance of the outer cave.

The noise was very much less here, and there was no need to shout at each other, and the sweet daylight was almost as welcome to Amy as to Jack.

"What is the time, Jack?"

"Take my watch out and look," said Jack, for his hands were occupied in holding his wife.

It was half-past three.

"We have another hour before we can get out of this cave yet. I can stand, Jack; my feet are wet through, so it won't matter; the sea won't come above my boots," said Amy.

Jack put her on to the ground again, for light as she was his arms ached, and said anxiously:

"Amy, I hope you won't be ill after this; I shall send for the doctor as soon as we get back to the hotel."

"I wonder they don't come and look for us; I left word I was going to the caves; Aunt Sophy must be back," said Amy.

She had scarcely finished speaking when a boat hove in sight containing Major Graham and a fisherman.

"Hulloa! Hi! Here we are!" shouted Jack, and the men

peering into the darkness of the cave, were attracted by Amy's cream serge dress, and shouting in reply rowed towards the cave.

"It is dear old Graham. God bless him," said Jack as the boat came nearer and nearer, until finally it was rowed into the cave.

"Great heavens! Lockwood, are you here? And Mrs. Lockwood too? Thank God, you are alive!" exclaimed Major Graham.

"Thank God it was a neap tide, or you would never have come out of that cave alive, sir," said the fisherman, who was steering his boat as close to Jack and Amy as possible.

And then there were broken sentences of relief and congratulation, and something very like sobs from both men, while Amy cried like a child.

"We have had the narrowest possible escape as it is. I quite gave us up for lost at one time. See, we have scarcely a dry thread on us," said Jack.

"My dearest fellow! I am so delighted to have found you and poor Mrs. Lockwood. Here, let me lift her into the boat," said Major Graham, when they were all three calmer.

"No need, sir; I'll get her close to the lady directly," said the fisherman, and in another minute or two Jack and Amy were safe in the boat, and as they rowed ashore Jack described their adventure.

They had a steep climb after they landed, and Amy was so exhausted that Major Graham and Jack between them carried her a great part of the way, and as soon as they reached the hotel Amy went to bed, and Jack rode straight back to St. Helier's with Major Graham, and sent the doctor out to see his wife.

Happily, the adventure did Amy no harm. She was none the worse for it, and quite able to hold a levee the next day, when, as Miss Keppel said, "all the island drove out to inquire for her."

Among these visitors was Mr. Stanley Hyde, the gentleman whom Amy found it so hard to suppress; but not content with coming once, he came the next day, and the next, in spite of the very cool reception he met with.

"If Jack knew it he would horsewhip him, I believe. What am I to do, Aunt Sophy? There will be no end of gossip if people know this man drives out here every day to see me, and I

dare not tell the hotel people to say 'not at home,' as I would order my own servants to do. I do wish the man would not be such a fool. I am certain Jack will have a row with him before we leave," said Amy on the fourth day, when to avoid their unwelcome guest they had gone for a drive to another bay.

"I think the best plan will be to go home at the end of the week," suggested Miss Keppel.

"I suppose it will, and I am sorry, for Jack won't let me go out to any parties till after this baby is born, and I would rather be here."

"My dear Amy, you can't leave your husband alone till August, nor can I leave the girls so long as that," said Miss Keppel.

Amy pouted, and muttered, "Bother the girls," but she went back to her house at the end of the week, secretly very glad to go, for she longed to be with her husband, but she was coy as a shy maiden, and did not wish Miss Keppel to guess she loved him.

During the summer she spent most of her afternoons at the tennis club, where she met all her friends, and in August her baby was born.

It was a boy, and Amy was very proud of him, for he was a fine healthy child, very different to the fragile delicate little Gladys, for whom she seemed to have no affection.

One afternoon, when the baby was about two months old, Amy was alone, and by some mistake Mr. Stanley Hyde was shown in, to her great annoyance, for she had a great antipathy to him.

He was a big man, with bold bad eyes, dyed hair and moustache, and an odious leer, which he thought very effective and which was very repellent; he was over-dressed, and had an insolent manner, which made him very unpopular, though his money and his position gave him the *entrée* to the best society in Jersey.

"Now, Mrs. Lockwood, I want you to come for a drive with me; it will do you no end of good," he said, sitting much closer to Amy than she liked.

"Thank you; I drive every day."

"But not with me. You must come with me. I won't take a refusal."

"Thank you; you are very kind, but I don't think Mr. Lockwood will let me," said Amy.

"Nonsense! he is a tyrant, I know, but he can't be so bad as that; besides he is not at home. Come now, there is time."

"No, thank you," said Amy, who was expecting Jack to come in every moment.

"There he is," she thought, as the door bell rung, but to her annoyance the servant came in, and asked if Mr. Janvrin could speak to her for a minute.

Amy knew the man had come for his quarterly cheque, which owing to her illness she had omitted to pay; she feared he would want more than ten pounds this quarter, for her bill was now very heavy; but what annoyed her most was that he should have clashed with Mr. Stanley Hyde, who was a great gossip, and would guess she owed the Janvrins money.

She must see him, for Jack would be in immediately, and she must prevent them from meeting at all hazards, so asking Mr. Hyde to excuse her, she went out.

As she feared, Mr. Janvrin was not satisfied with ten pounds this quarter, and very civilly hinted he must appeal to Mr. Lockwood unless he could have more. At her wits' ends to know what to do, Amy promised him another ten pounds at the end of the week, and succeeded in getting rid of him before Jack came in.

"Ah! that fellow Janvrin is worrying you, is he? Can I be of any use? I'll give you a blank cheque with pleasure. You can pay me when you like, you know," said Mr. Stanley Hyde, on her return.

"No, thank you. I don't want any money; if I did my husband is the only person I should apply to," said Amy coldly.

"Ye—es! Janvrin and I are old acquaintances. I know who owes him money almost as well as he knows himself; but I am very discreet; I never tell the husbands of his creditors."

"How honourable!" said Amy, with the suspicion of a sneer not lost on her visitor.

"There are conceivable circumstances under which I might break through my rule," said Mr. Hyde, in a very meaning tone.

"Indeed! May I ask what they may be?" said Amy, still speaking sarcastically.

"Persistent refusal to comply with my requests. Mrs. Lockwood, I am giving a picnic next month; you must come to it," said Mr. Hyde.

And Amy knew by his manner and tone, as he intended she should, that if she refused he would let Jack know of her difficulties in some way or other.

Probably he would send him an anonymous letter, for anonymous letters are rather a feature in the manners and customs of a certain set of Jersey people, and Mr. Hyde was quite capable of writing one.

She must go to this picnic then, and she must devise some way of avoiding the drive, which she inwardly resolved no power on earth should induce her to take with Mr. Hyde.

The picnic Mr. Hyde spoke of was a kind of entertainment very popular in Jersey; the order of which is to drive out to one of the bays, and after scrambling about the rocks for an hour or so go to an hotel where a high tea has been ordered, after which dancing goes on till ten or eleven, when the guests drive home by moonlight.

Amy promised to go to this picnic, which was to be at Bouley Bay, but she said nothing about it to Jack until the formal invitation arrived.

"I shall accept this, Jack, and you must come with me," she said, tossing the card to her husband.

Jack looked at it and answered quickly:

"Stanley Hyde! Decline it, Amy. I would not accept his hospitality on any account; besides, those draughty rooms and the long drive at night won't do for you. I can't let you run any risk of another illness."

"Nonsense, Jack. I am quite well now, and I wish to go; in fact I have promised to go. If you won't come with me I must go alone, much as I dislike doing so," said Amy.

"You can't go alone, and no power on earth would persuade me to go; and, as I said before, you are not strong enough yet for a Jersey picnic. Brown told me that for three months you must be very careful of cold," said Jack.

"That is absurd. It will be nearly three months by the day of the picnic, and I shall certainly keep my promise and go," said Amy.

"You will do nothing of the kind. I weakly allowed you to go to that sand-eeling party, which so nearly proved fatal to you, when Gladys was born; now I intend to be firm, and until Dr. Brown assures me there is no risk of cold or over-excitement, I must insist on your refusing all invitations to dances and picnics," said Jack decidedly.

"I have already accepted this invitation, so I must go," said Amy with that air of a spoilt child Jack knew so well.

"You cannot go, Amy. Don't be childish," said Jack impatiently.

"I must, and will go," said Amy.

"No, you will not. I positively forbid it. I will answer the invitation myself," said Jack, rising and leaving the room to put an end to the conversation.

Amy was in a dilemma.

This was the first time Jack had ever asserted his marital authority; she was not sure what course he would take if she disobeyed him secretly; to do so openly would, she knew, be impossible, for he would prevent her.

On the other hand, if she did not go to the party Mr. Stanley Hyde would certainly tell Jack of her debts, and not for the world would she have that happen. It would estrange Jack from her for ever; no hope of her ever winning his love if he found out she was in debt; he would despise her, nay, she believed he would hate her for having tarnished his honour, knowing as she did what a horror he had of owing money.

In her heart of hearts she had no wish to go to this party. She would hate it if Jack were not there; she would a thousand times rather be at home with him. Oh, how she had changed. She who, before that scene in the cave, would have scorned an evening alone with her husband.

But go she must, or Mr. Stanley Hyde would fulfil his threat. She must prevent that at all hazards, even though it involved disobeying her husband, as it certainly would. That was the lesser evil of the two; she must choose that. So she wrote to Mr. Hyde and told him that, although Mr. Lockwood was declining the invitation for both of them, she intended to come to the picnic. Then she tried her powers of persuasion on her doctor, and endeavoured to get him to say she ran no risk in going to the picnic, but here she failed, for the doctor refused to take the responsibility.

Baffled but not defeated, Amy said no more about the picnic, and Jack thought she had forgotten it.

On the day fixed for the picnic Mrs. Lockwood announced at luncheon that she was going out to Saumarez Cottage that afternoon to see her aunts, and should not be back till night, as she intended to stay to dinner.

"You must have a fly, then; you can't drive home in the pony-

carriage. I shall dine at the mess," said Jack, not sorry to have an opportunity of so doing.

No more was said, and at half-past four that afternoon Mrs. Lockwood drove off in a close carriage, but instead of going to Saumarez Cottage, she ordered the coachman to drive her to Bouley Bay.

At six o'clock that evening Jack left his club to go home and dress for mess, and as he passed a bookseller's shop by the club he met Miss Keppel stepping out of the shop into her carriage.

He stopped to help her in, remarking she was out rather late for her.

"Yes ; and we are dining out to-night. Tell Hobbs to drive fast, will you ?"

"Dining out ! Why, Amy has gone to have tea and dinner with you," said Jack in amazement.

"Nonsense, Jack ; she knows we are engaged. You must have made a mistake," said Miss Keppel.

"I suppose I have," said Jack in a very grave tone, for it flashed upon him at that moment that this was the day of Mr. Hyde's picnic.

Was Amy gone to it ?

Had she dared to disobey him ?

Would she condescend to deceive him about so paltry a matter ?

With knitted brows and compressed mouth, Jack Lockwood walked home as fast as his legs could take him.

"Is your mistress at home ?" he asked.

"No, sir. Mrs. Lockwood went out in a close carriage about two hours ago, and left word she would not be home till night. There is no dinner, sir, this evening."

"No, quite right. Mrs. Lockwood is gone to Bouley Bay, I believe ?" said Jack at a venture.

"Yes, sir. I heard her give the order," said the maid, confirming his suspicion.

"I want a close fly as soon as possible," said Jack ; but instead of dressing for mess he only made a slight alteration in his dress, and when the fly came he ordered the man to drive him, not to the Fort, but to Bouley Bay.

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO EVES.

"FELIX, I am a very wicked woman."

"Indeed. When did you discover that ?" replied Felix.

The first speaker was Frances Selsey, with whom Felix was spending the evening in the month of October. Her boy, now a year old, was in bed, and they were waiting dinner for Mr. Selsey, who had just come in from his parish.

"I have often expected it, but what has specially impressed it on my mind now is, I have disobeyed my husband," said Frances.

"You, Frances! I can scarcely believe it possible," said Felix.

"It is about the yacht. I so often regret that Tom has had to give it up, for he misses it so much. At last he told me I was not even to think of it again, and on no account to mention it," and here Frances paused.

"Well," said Felix, looking very big and handsome as he stood on the hearthrug, smiling down at Frances and her confession.

"Well, I have pinched and screwed and saved up enough money to hire it for him for next summer from the man he sold it to, and he is to have it from the end of March to October; and now I am afraid to tell him, and I want you to do it for me. Do you think it was very wrong of me, Felix?"

"Very. Tom will sue for a separation, to a certainty."

"Don't be silly, Felix. I am in earnest. It was disobeying him, and I vowed to obey him when we were married," said Frances, as the door opened and Mr. Selsey came in.

"Here he is. Let us put the case before him. Tom, what would you say if one of those ladies of your flock, who occupy so many of your spare half-hours, told you she had disobeyed her husband?" said Felix to his brother-in-law.

"I should probably tell her her husband was the proper person to receive such a confession, and, by so doing, stop all such confidences from the same quarter. Why?"

"Only because Frances has just confessed to me that she has been disobeying you, and I wished to know how to act."

"I know better. Frances is a pattern wife," said Mr. Selsey, laying one hand on his wife's head and tilting it back to look full into her eyes.

"It is true, Tom, and I do hope you won't be angry with me. It is about your yacht," said Frances.

"Hush! I told you never to mention that to me again."

"I know; but I must just this once. I have hired it for you for all next summer."

"Did you ever hear of such contumacy in your life, Tom? I hope you'll deal summarily with it," put in Felix.

"Frances, you are a very sinful woman to spoil your husband in this way. How did you manage to get the money?" said Mr. Selsey, looking so delighted that Frances was more than repaid for all the small sacrifices she had had to make.

"Oh, a little economy did it. And you are really not angry with me, Tom?" said Frances, as dinner was announced.

During dinner the conversation turned on Green, whose two years' term of probation would expire at the end of the year. He had been sober all this time, but then he had been so shielded from temptation that Mr. Selsey dreaded lest he should relapse when all restraint was removed.

"I should like to be certain of him before Rose comes back to him," he remarked.

"Why not get Lockwood to take him back for three months on trial? It would be a very good test if he resisted the temptation in Jersey, drink is so cheap there," said Felix.

"That's a very good idea, Felix, for Lockwood would look after him, knowing his story. The question is, would he care for the risk? I must write and ask him," said Mr. Selsey. "By the way, Frances, talking of Jersey reminds me that I heard from home this morning, and mother tells me Major Graham is at Oxburgh again. Do you think Joy means to have him after all?"

"Dear Joy, I wish she would. I should so like to see her married, and I feel sure Major Graham would make her happy," said Frances.

"You are wrong there, Frances. There is only one man in the world, besides myself, who would ever make Joy happy; and he, with all due deference to him, was a fool when he allowed my pet aversion to beguile him into marrying her. I often wonder how that marriage, which certainly was not made in heaven, has turned out," said Mr. Selsey.

"So do I. We have quite lost sight of Amy now, and we were like sisters," said Frances.

"I am going over to stay with her for New Year's Day. She wrote and invited me to go now, but I can't get away. I shall go at the end of the year, though, for I don't care to keep up this coldness any longer," said Felix.

He did not add that Amy had also asked him to lend her some money, a request he had granted.

"Are you? Then I'll tell you what, Felix; you may as well effect a reconciliation while you are there, between Rose and Green, if he keeps sober till then," said Mr. Selsey.

"Is Rose in Jersey, then?" asked Frances.

"Oh, the curiosity of woman! No, you inquisitive person; Rose is not in Jersey. Felix, I flatter myself I have kept that secret uncommonly well, seeing I labour under the disadvantage of being a married man."

"You very nearly let the cat out of the bag then, though," said Felix.

"If you knew the life Frances has led me, trying to worm that secret out of me, you'd eschew matrimony. Just ask Lockwood, when you go to Jersey, if he has ever dared to have a secret from his wife. I'll engage to say he never has," said Mr. Selsey.

"Amy is much more likely to have secrets from him," said Frances.

This conversation took place on the evening of Mr. Stanley Hyde's picnic at Bouley Bay, and could Mr. Selsey only have known what was happening in that romantic spot that evening, his opinion of Amy would not have risen any higher.

Mrs. Lockwood was not enjoying herself. In the first place, there were one or two people there who were not in her set, and whom she considered bad style; in the second, Mr. Stanley Hyde, of whom she was secretly afraid, was so pressing in his attentions as to be positively offensive, to say nothing of the food for scandal he was offering his other guests; and, in the third, she was dreading the consequences if by any chance her husband should find out where she was.

The tea, which was practically a cold dinner, with champagne instead of tea to drink, was finished shortly before eight o'clock, when the room was cleared for dancing. While this was being done, the guests strolled about the cliffs and looked at the moonlight on the sea beneath them, laughing, talking and flirting the while. Amy, Mr. Stanley Hyde and two officers, whom she was exerting herself to fascinate in order to keep them with her and so avoid a *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Hyde, these four were standing close to the hotel, when a carriage drove up.

"Another arrival—who can it be, Hyde?" said one officer.

"Whoever it is, is come the day after the fair," said the other officer.

"I can't imagine who it can be. Every one has arrived," said Mr. Hyde.

"Why, it is Lockwood! It is your husband, Mrs. Lockwood," said the first officer, as Jack got out of the carriage.

Amy turned hot and cold, and most devoutly wished the earth would open and swallow her up.

What would he do?

Would he quarrel with Mr. Hyde?

Would he reprove her before the rest of the party?

He looked very implacable as he advanced to the little group of which she formed the centre. He was very handsome, Amy thought with pride; but how grave and stern he was for so young a man—and oh! how her heart beat as he approached.

"Good evening, Hyde. I have come to fetch Mrs. Lockwood. She is not out of the doctor's hands yet, and is ordered to be indoors by sunset, but I could not get here sooner. Amy, have you any more wraps?" said Jack.

"You don't mean to say you are going to take Mrs. Lockwood away at once? Why, her card is full; I can't hear of such a thing," said Mr. Hyde.

The two officers also raised their protest, and some other friends coming up united their entreaties to Mr. Lockwood to allow his wife to stay later, but Jack was firm, and resisted all their prayers courteously but decidedly.

The men were furious; the ladies secretly rejoiced, as Amy, too much frightened to offer more than a feeble protest, was driven away by her angry lord and master.

Not a word was spoken during the drive home. Jack was too angry to trust himself to speak; Amy felt like a naughty child, and was too much mortified to care for conversation; but though mortified, on the whole she congratulated herself on having got well out of her difficulty.

Jack was angry, it was true; but he did not know of her debts, that was a comfort, and Mr. Stanley Hyde was flattered by her going to his party and so was not likely to betray her; and it had all been arranged without a quarrel between Jack and Mr. Hyde. On the whole, Amy thought she had little to repent of, especially as Jack had so acted that every one would

suppose it was only anxiety for her health which had led him to come for her. Mr. Hyde was the only person likely to suspect any other motive, and he would keep his own counsel on this point.

"Amy, the next time you disobey me, I shall be obliged if you will do so openly; I hate deceit," said Jack, when they got home, and that was the only remark he made on the subject; but it cut Amy deeper than if he had taken a whip and lashed her.

He scarcely spoke to his wife for the next week, except at meals or when any one was present who would observe his silence, but Amy, though conscious she had been wrong, while she deprecated his anger, and wondered if they were to spend the remainder of their lives in this silence, was too proud to make any advances.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MISS DORCAS'S DILEMMA.

ONE morning in November, Miss Keppel was writing letters in the library; Miss Lydia was absorbed in a novel in the drawing-room, and Miss Dorcas was engaged in potting plants in the greenhouse which opened into the drawing-room; her occupation being interrupted constantly by a chase after a puppy, a new possession, and one which did not tend to preserve the peace of the house, for it was always in mischief. Presently Miss Lydia looked up from her novel, and glancing out of the window, said:

"Why, Dorcas, here is the postman with the Weymouth letters. How very odd; the Southampton boat is only now coming in."

"Perhaps there is one for me, the Cape mail is due to-day," said Miss Dorcas, leaving the puppy in the conservatory, and a large fern she had just unpotted on the floor by the side of it, while she went to meet the postman.

There was a letter for her, and seeing it was the one she expected from Mr. Dobson, she went into the dining-room to read it, leaving Miss Lydia to her novel and the puppy to its own devices.

Pulling off her gardening gloves, she broke the seal and read as follows:

"Dearest Dorcas—"

"Cape Town, October 10th.

"Is he mad?" thought Miss Dorcas, for his letters always began in a much more decorous fashion.

"Your dear letter has made me the happiest man on this side of the grave."

"My dear letter! Bless the man, I owe him a letter. I have not written to him for weeks," she muttered.

"The moment it arrived I made arrangements to start for Jersey, to fetch my bride."

"Poor fellow! He must have had sunstroke; he is evidently quite daft," said Miss Dorcas.

"And in all probability I shall reach Saumarez Cottage as soon as this letter, for I leave by the same ship."

"Heavens! What does he mean? Surely the doctors won't let him come," thought Miss Dorcas.

"It had pleased the Lord to deal sorely with his minister, and I was feeling very downcast and lonely when your letter, which has changed the whole current of my life, reached me."

"What on earth is he thinking of?"

"Dorcas, knowing me as you do, you will not, I know, be surprised to hear that the first thing I did, after reading it, was to kneel down and praise the Lord, who has done such wonderful things for me."

"I am surprised. I am amazed," said Miss Dorcas.

"That it should at last have pleased Him to grant my prayer, after all these weary years of waiting, and when I had, I hope, submissively bowed my head to my lonely lot; then, to give me my Dorcas as the companion of my heart and home, was joy unspeakable, and I praised Him with a heart filled with gratitude."

"What can he mean? He is as mad as a hatter," muttered the recipient of this letter.

"Dorcas, when I think my lonely days and nights are over, my heart feels as light as a boy's. I forget my fifty years. I remember nothing but 'Dorcas is coming.'"

"And the sooner you forget such stuff the better," said Miss Dorcas.

"I look round my modest home and think soon Dorcas will be there, and I count the hours till I start to fetch her whom my soul loveth. The mail is leaving; I must end, for I, too, leave with it.

"Your loving JOSIAH DOBSON."

Miss Dorcas sunk on to the nearest chair when she had finished reading this extraordinary epistle, and then, with it lying in her lap, tried, but tried in vain, to fathom its meaning; the more she pondered over it, the more mysterious did it seem.

She examined the handwriting, but it was firm and clear as ever; it showed no sign of mental aberration.

She read the letter again, and this time she grasped the fact that if he were on his way to Jersey, it was quite possible he might arrive that very day by the Southampton boat. While she was thus occupied, Miss Lydia was so much interested in a love-scene she was reading, in which the hero was to her mind the fac-simile of one of her own lovers, and the heroine a second edition of herself, though in reality a most striking contrast to what Miss Lydia ever was, so much interested was she that she did not notice the puppy.

This delightful creature, with a canine desire to be helpful to his absent mistress, had seized the fern Miss Dorcas had been potting, by the fronds, and was now successfully engaged in breaking the ball of mould round its roots by dragging it about the drawing-room carpet, to the great detriment of the latter.

Miss Lydia went on with her love-scene; her prototype's lips had met the hero's in one long kiss in the most approved fashion; the puppy had just shaken the last piece of mould off the fern root when the door opened, and what a sight met Miss Keppel's eyes!

Her drawing-room, which had been swept that morning, was a mass of mould and fern leaves, which were scattered all over it in all directions till there was some excuse for her remark that it looked more like a ploughed field than a lady's drawing-room.

"Good gracious me, Lydia! Look here! Just see what that wretched puppy has been doing. Dorcas! Where is Dorcas? Come here! Ring the bell, Lydia, at once for Mary. Dear me, dear me! you two girls and the puppy will drive me crazy," exclaimed Miss Keppel.

Miss Dorcas, hearing her sister call, slipped the letter which had so disturbed her equanimity into her pocket, and rushed to the rescue.

Miss Lydia, novel in hand, was walking about on tip-toe, shaking her skirts and gazing with unmitigated horror at the room so recently swept and garnished, into which a spirit seven times worse than the ordinary evil spirit who scatters dust in unseemly places had entered so unceremoniously.

"Really, Dorcas, that puppy is incorrigible," she remarked.

"The puppy! I don't blame the puppy; why on earth did you sit here and allow it to do it?" said Miss Dorcas.

"I was reading and didn't notice the dog, Dorcas," remonstrated Miss Lydia.

"Notice, indeed! it is all your fault and mine, not the dog's," said Miss Dorcas.

"I don't care whose fault it is, Dorcas; I insist upon the dog being well whipped," said Miss Keppel, who was clearly of opinion that vicarious punishment was better than no punishment at all.

"Well, I can whip the puppy, but it is Lydia's fault," said Miss Dorcas, who it appeared would have infinitely preferred to whip Miss Lydia; but she took up a dog-whip and went after the puppy, who, conscience-stricken, was hiding from the inevitable sequel to its performance.

Miss Dorcas subsequently found it a quarter of an hour later under a seat in the garden, and taking it back to the scene of its transgression held it by the skin of its neck and proceeded to whip it, taking care to hurt it as little as possible, scolding it loudly the while.

"There, you wicked, wicked dog; see what your Aunt Lydia allowed you to do, while she was reading a trashy novel. Who is the more to blame, I should like to know?"

"Dorcas!" said a well-known voice, and dropping the puppy, Miss Dorcas turned round and saw Mr. Dobson, who had entered the room unannounced, considering the object of his mission too romantic to admit of the conventionality of being announced.

"Mr. Dobson," said Miss Dorcas, nervously scanning her visitor to see if he showed any signs of insanity.

"Say Josiah, Dorcas, under the circumstances," said Mr. Dobson, taking Miss Dorcas's hands into his fat soft ones.

"What circumstances?" inquired Miss Dorcas, without a vestige of lurking romance in her tone.

"Those happy circumstances under which I have come so far, Dorcas," continued the elderly lover.

"I don't know what they are. Are you alluding to the fine passage you must have had?"

"Is she coy, my Dorcas? I am alluding to your letter, your dear, dear letter, my love," said Mr. Dobson, squeezing Miss Dorcas's hands as he gently lifted them up and down.

"My letter! What letter? I have not written to you for weeks; I have just had one from you that I can't make head or tail of," said Miss Dorcas abruptly, drawing her hands away.

"The coy creature! This letter, my beloved," said Mr. Dobson, pulling a letter from his breast-pocket and holding it up.

Miss Dorcas glanced at the envelope; it was her handwriting! She grasped the letter.

"Let me see it."

"It is your own writing, you see," said Mr. Dobson playfully, as he gave her the letter.

"Yes, I see it is; but for all that I never wrote it, I know by the date," said Miss Dorcas, glancing at the letter.

"Read it, Dorcas, read it; you will remember then," said Mr. Dobson, a possible fear that perhaps after all Miss Dorcas had not written it entering his head.

Miss Dorcas sat down, opened the letter and read as follows:

"Saumarez Cottage,
"October.

"MY DEAR JOSIAH—"

Josiah, indeed! Such horrible familiarity, unmaidenly as it was, gave Miss Dorcas a shock, and would at once have sufficed, had she needed any proofs, to convince her the letter was none of hers. She gasped for breath and continued reading:

"I miss you very much, so much that at the risk of your thinking me unmaidenly, I write these lines to say, if you will come back—but oh! how shall I ever say the rest? If you will come back, you, you, you shall not return to Africa *alone*.

"Your own, if you will have it so,

"DORCAS."

That was all.

The letter was short, but then it was also sweet, much too sweet to please Miss Dorcas.

For a few moments she was speechless, utterly dumfounded at the dilemma in which she found herself.

The handwriting was so exact an imitation of her writing, that but for the matter of the letter, which by no possibility could she have composed, she could not have sworn the writing was not hers; every little trick of penmanship was successfully copied.

As far as the handwriting was concerned she could not blame

Mr. Dobson for thinking it hers ; but that he, knowing her so well, should think her capable of such boldness was to her inexplicable, except on the ground that the wish was father to the thought.

They were a very strange-looking pair of lovers, could any one have seen them just then ; she, with her short grizzly grey hair, always rough and curly, rougher and curlier than usual ; her small bright eyes sparkling with excitement, her cheeks flushed as she sat bolt upright on a high chair, her hands folded over the mysterious letter ; he standing opposite to her, rubbing his soft white hands in perplexity, his bald head bent towards her with a look of such pathetic earnestness on his plain face, framed in ugly bushy whiskers, as almost to redeem it from its ugliness.

Miss Dorcas was the first to speak, and with her usual bluntness, she looked up at him and said in her abrupt tone :

"Did you seriously think I wrote that letter?"

The plain, homely face, fringed with pepper and salt whiskers, grew very pale ; beads of perspiration stood on the smooth forehead, the lips quivered, the ordinary blue-grey eyes shone with a strange light, as Mr. Dobson answered in a low, unnatural voice :

"For God's sake, Dorcas, don't say you didn't."

It was, perhaps, the first and only time in his life Mr. Dobson was ever guilty of such an expression ; it was a strong one from any man, from him it showed he was stirred to the very depths of his nature ; he was quite unconscious of his profanity, as in calmer moments he would have called his language.

He wanted to express that it was of infinite consequence to him whether Miss Dorcas wrote that letter or not, and he used the first words which came into his mind to express that fact. Miss Dorcas was genuinely frightened ; she had known for the last quarter of a century that he loved her ; she had not known till that moment how deeply.

Her answer was clearly a matter of life and death to him now ; he had been so buoyed up with hope for the last three weeks, that to be suddenly plunged into despair at the very moment he believed his happiness to be within his grasp, was more than he could bear, as the ashen-grey look on his face and that strange light in his eyes bore witness.

She did not answer ; she could not say she wrote the letter ; she dared not say she didn't.

"Dorcas, speak ; say you wrote it."

Still Miss Dorcas hesitated.

She could not quench the last spark of hope in her friend's breast ; she could not strike the blow from which something told her he would never recover, neither could she make up her mind to marry him ; to sacrifice her independence, her tastes, her will ; to give up a life which suited and satisfied her, for a life which she did not think would suit her at all.

In spite of her abrupt manner she was a very sensitive woman, and she had a keen sense of humour, and she shrank from the satire her marriage would call forth among all her acquaintances.

She was strongly of opinion that no woman should marry after she was forty ; she was no advocate of marriage at any age ; at her own she thought it worse than folly ; could she bring herself to be the laughing-stock of the island ?

On the other hand, she had often been heard to say there was only one thing worse than marrying a man which a woman could do, and that was to jilt him, and to bring a man all the way from Africa to marry her, and then refuse to marry him, was a very bad form of jilting.

True, she had not actually done so, but her good or evil genius had done it for her, and the consequences to Mr. Dobson would be the same as if she herself had written the letter which brought him to England.

All this passed rapidly through her mind, far quicker than it takes to tell, till at last another appeal from Mr. Dobson clinched her decision.

"Dorcas, speak ; this suspense is killing me."

And then Miss Dorcas rose, and dropping the letter to the ground, put both her hands into Mr. Dobson's and said :

"I will go back with you."

And when she did so, she made as true a sacrifice as woman ever made, though no one would give her credit for it, as she knew well enough ; she also knew the greatest sacrifices are those of which the world is ignorant.

(To be continued.)